I am in favor of a moratorium. Honestly. And if such a decision were adopted at the state level, I would comply with it in the most conscientious manner.

In fact, what was stopping us from adopting a general, universally binding decision: to ban any public discussion of the history of the Great Patriotic War. For a hundred years. Until 2045.

No books, no articles. In school textbooks—a brief note stating that a moratorium is in effect in the country. And only when memories of this Apocalypse that actually took place cease to be a bleeding wound in the heart of the people, when the last veterans are gone, when the ashes of unknown soldiers become, as the song says, “just earth and grass”— — only then will we declassify ALL the archives for EVERYONE who wishes to work with them, and we will get to work. Through our collective efforts, we will create a truthful, document-based history of the Great War.

That is exactly how things were done here—only exactly the opposite.

Authentic wartime documents were classified and guarded behind seven locks, as particularly important state secrets. Even newspapers—the central Soviet newspapers of the prewar and wartime periods—were removed from the open collections of public libraries. Speeches by Molotov and Stalin, the texts of international treaties publicly concluded by the Soviet Union in 1939–1941—all of this is a secret. A terrible military secret.

For half a century, this meticulously organized vacuum of reliable information was filled with texts as formulaic as nesting dolls, in which the same officially mandated myths were diligently rewritten. Military history, as an exact science of facts and documents, was almost entirely supplanted by propaganda slogans. It even reached such absurdities as one and the same high-ranking official alternately serving as head of the Institute of Military History and… the Special Propaganda Department of the Soviet Army’s Main Political Administration!

The most crucial question—one that a small group of people with boundless loyalty to the Party labored to “clarify”—was why, in the very first weeks of the war, the Red Army had been crushed, routed, and, for the most part, taken prisoner? Why had the Wehrmacht managed to reach the shores of Lake Ladoga, the steppes of Kalmykia, and the mountains of the Caucasus? Why did the flames of war reach places where foreign invaders had not been seen since the great uprisings and anarchy of the early 17th century? How did it happen that the bulk of all the sacrifices, all the blood and sweat of the war, were expended only to regain by the fall of 1944 what had been lost in the first few weeks of the retreat?

Comrade Stalin himself was the first to point out the causes of the Red Army’s “temporary setbacks.” In his famous radio address to his “brothers and sisters” on July 3, 1941, and later, in greater detail, in a report delivered at a solemn meeting marking the 24th anniversary of the October Revolution, Stalin cited three factors that allegedly accounted for the Wehrmacht’s successes:

— the German army had been mobilized in advance and moved up to the borders of the USSR, while the Soviet Union, maintaining strict neutrality, went about its normal, peaceful life;

— Our tanks and aircraft are better than the Germans’, but we still have very few of them—far fewer than the enemy;

— for every step it took deeper into Soviet territory, the Wehrmacht paid with enormous, irreparable

losses (Stalin specifically cited the figure of 4.5 million Germans killed and wounded).

Two weeks later, Sovinformburo took the liberty of contradicting Comrade Stalin's own statement—an unprecedented event in the history of that agency. It was announced that by mid-November 1941, the Wehrmacht's losses had already reached 6 million men.

Let us give Comrade Stalin his due. He lied, but he lied wisely. From his knowingly false fabrications emerged the image of a peace-loving country with great potential. Yes, we have few tanks today—but tomorrow we will have many; we were not the first to begin mobilization—but now we will gather everything for the front and for victory. Germany, on the other hand, cannot afford to lose six million soldiers every six months, which means that in the very near future, "in six months or a year, it will collapse under the weight of its own crimes." This was precisely the outlook Stalin outlined when speaking from the rostrum of the Mausoleum at the parade on November 7, 1941. And from the standpoint of military propaganda (which has no obligation to be truthful), he said exactly what needed to be said to the people heading into battle.

After the war, Soviet "historians" were tasked with reinforcing the lie, while making it seem slightly more plausible. It was no easy task—but they managed it.

The fact that the Wehrmacht lost 4.5 (or even 6) million men at the start of the war was forgotten, hushed up, and never mentioned again. The logic here is very simple—by that time, the German archives had already been opened, and materials—including those on personnel losses—had been published; continuing to lie in this way would have meant making themselves a laughingstock to the whole world.

As a form of "compensation," the portrayal of the Soviet Union's defenselessness was reinforced by the claim that the bulk of the tanks and aircraft in the Red Army's arsenal at the start of the war consisted of hopelessly obsolete junk that was "no match whatsoever" for the enemy's equipment. The argument about the "sudden attack" also began to be put forward much more insistently and loudly (Stalin himself tried not to emphasize the notorious "suddenness" of the attack, focusing instead on the word "treacherous"—and these are two very different things. The "treachery" narrative portrays Hitler as a criminal, while the "surprise attack" narrative depicts Stalin as a blind, naive fool). Nikita Khrushchev, upon coming to power, also tweaked the narrative of the war's outbreak slightly. He portrayed Stalin as a stubborn fool—Richard Sorge and Winston Churchill had sent him their famous "warnings," but he wouldn't listen to anyone...

Thus, by the end of the 1950s, the version that would be hammered into the public consciousness in the following decades with the persistence and relentlessness of a steam hammer had finally taken shape:

first, we are a peaceful people; we did not prepare for war; our government fought for peace throughout the world and tried to prevent the USSR from being drawn into the war;

second, "history left us little time," so we didn't manage to produce anything (tanks, cannons, airplanes, or even enough rifles), and our army entered the war almost unarmed (a bottle of incendiary mixture played a key role here; even those who know nothing about the history of the war are familiar with this bottle);

third, Stalin did not allow the army to be brought to a state of any particular "war readiness," and therefore German bombs rained down on "peacefully sleeping Soviet airfields."

From this three-part argument (which was repeated ad nauseam in every book—from school textbooks to thick monographs), the answer to the question of who was to blame for the terrible catastrophe followed easily and simply. The culprits turned out to be:

— history, which “gave us too little time”;

— Hitler, who failed to warn Stalin of his intentions two or three months in advance;

— and, finally, the excessive naivety and gullibility of Comrade Stalin, who was generally a positive figure.

In this narrative, the Communist Party was assigned only one role—that of the organizer and inspirer of all our victories.

It was all clear, simple, and logical. Any attempt to question the veracity of these myths was dismissed as ranging from “cynical mockery of the memory of the fallen” to “a new foray by literary Vlasovites.” I’ll admit: I used to believe all of this myself. Then, in high school, some vague doubts began to surface. Over the years, they only grew stronger.

In fact, under Comrade Stalin, the entire Soviet people worked. All the men worked. Almost all the women worked. Maternity leave was granted for four months: two before and two after childbirth. Then—from the cradle to the workbench. The country worked from early morning until late at night. As for the military factories, they had been operating in three shifts—from morning until morning—long before the war. And, mind you, not a single one of those hundreds of millions of workers was a merchandiser, speechwriter, image consultant, trader, broker, dealer, or shmiler… Everyone was actually toiling away on the production line.

So where did all that production go?

How could we have ended up with fewer tanks and airplanes than Germany? What, then, were these factories—smoking around the clock—actually making? Refrigerators and juicers for communal kitchens?

Low labor productivity? Don’t jump to conclusions, dear reader. Let’s first hear what the experts have to say.

In 1936, Louis Charles Breguet, head of France’s largest aircraft manufacturer (which, together with Dassault, continues to produce the “Mirage” jet fighters to this day), was able to visit the Soviet Union’s aircraft factories. In his report on his trip to the USSR, he wrote: “Using ten times as many workers as France, the Soviet aviation industry produces 20 times as many aircraft.” In April 1941, German Air Attaché G. Aschenbrenner, accompanied by a group of ten engineers, visited the USSR’s major aircraft manufacturing facilities (TsAGI, Moscow Plants Nos. 1, 22, and 24, and the Rybinsk and Perm engine plants). In a report submitted to Göring, Aschenbrenner wrote: “Each of these plants was a gigantic enterprise, employing up to 30,000 people in each of the three shifts; the work was perfectly organized, everything was thought out down to the smallest detail, and the equipment was modern and in good condition...”

And at that time, Germany had two and a half times fewer people than the USSR. German women

stayed at home and raised their children. As these children grew up, they sang Nazi marches and marched in formation, pulling their socks up—not after work, but instead of working. In the second year of World War II, Germany's aircraft factories were operating on a single shift! Aluminum, which was in extremely short supply during the war, was used to produce garden sheds and step ladders for picking pears. The production capacity of German factories was tied up in the manufacture of gramophones and bicycles, radio receivers and passenger cars, Fildepers stockings, and razor blades. Mass production of the first combat tanks, airplanes, and submarines did not begin until 1935–1936—less than one five-year plan cycle before the start of World War II.

So when exactly did the Germans manage to achieve that notorious "multiple superiority in tanks and aircraft"? And from what resources could they have created it?

Germany has no bauxite, nickel, manganese, tungsten, copper, rubber, or oil of its own... It even lacked simple coal and iron ore; throughout the war, the Germans had to transport iron ore by sea from Sweden—under bombardment by Allied aircraft. But Stalin had the entire periodic table at his disposal, including "stainless gold"—the currency with which everything was purchased in France, America, and even Germany itself: the latest equipment—entire factories' worth—the newest aircraft engines, the world's best transport planes, the finest minds, and the most secret blueprints.

And all of that wasn't enough to arm the Red Army at least as well as the fledgling Wehrmacht?

For several years, the author was distracted from pondering these questions by his studies at an aviation institute, followed by the design of a laser cannon at a classified design bureau, then work in a coal-fired boiler room, and the social struggles of the era of glasnost and perestroika.

This struggle was not entirely in vain. Yes, much less than one would have liked, but still, in the early 1990s, a large number of documents from the eve and beginning of the war were introduced into scholarly circulation, and previously classified works by Soviet military historians were published in the open press. Furthermore, the new era of openness, freedom of the press, and the Internet has made the rich treasure trove of works by German historians and memoirists accessible to independent researchers. And although to this day vast amounts of documentary material remain hidden from the public (without any reasonable explanation), what has already been made public is quite sufficient to assess in detail and with precision the balance of power between the sides as of June 22, 1941.

Yes, of course, there was absolutely no "technical superiority of the Wehrmacht." A World War I-era cannon was pulled by a team of six horses; the Wehrmacht infantry's main means of transportation was a pair of legs for each soldier, and that soldier was armed with the most ordinary rifle (it's only in bad Soviet movies that all Germans in 1941 are shown carrying submachine guns; in reality, according to the standard equipment list, even the elite "first-wave" divisions of the Wehrmacht had 11,500 rifles and only 486 submachine guns).

Of course, Stalin's highly militarized empire, which had spent many years preparing for the Great War by straining every resource of the world's richest country to the limit, armed and equipped its army as well as possible. Of course, the Red Army had more tanks and aircraft, anti-aircraft guns and tracked tractors, airfields, and airships than the armies of England, France, and Germany combined.

Of course, the scientific and technical level of Soviet military production did not merely "meet the world's best standards," but in a number of areas actually set them. The world's best high-altitude interceptor (MiG-3), the world's best aircraft cannons (VYa-23), the world's best tanks (the light

BT-7M, the medium T-34, and the heavy KV), the world's first multiple-launch rocket systems (BM-13 "Katyusha"), the most advanced artillery systems, radars, rotary-cassette aerial bombs, flamethrower tanks, and so on and so forth—all of this existed, and not just on blueprints or as experimental prototypes, but had been put into mass production.

Of course, the concentration of a three-million-strong Wehrmacht force near the western borders of the USSR had been detected well in advance by Soviet intelligence (which, incidentally, somewhat exaggerated the size of the enemy's forces). And although authentic documents revealing the German high command's operational plans never reached Stalin's desk, Hitler's Germany's overall military and political readiness for aggression in the East was no secret to either the USSR's top leadership or the senior commanders of the Red Army.

The available documents irrefutably show that the covert mobilization and strategic deployment of the Soviet Armed Forces began BEFORE, not after, the first artillery salvos at the border. As for the purpose of this deployment, discussion on this matter is both possible and necessary. Be that as it may, in June 1941 the Red Army was preparing for war—a war that was expected to begin within the coming weeks or even days. The most the Germans could have achieved in such a situation was a tactical surprise that was very limited in both time and space. And nothing more.

Where to Begin

As is often (or always?) the case in the history of science, new knowledge, having resolved old questions, has raised new, far more complex ones. Once it became impossible to hide behind the smokescreen of knowingly false fabrications about the "Wehrmacht's overwhelming numerical superiority," the discussion of the true causes of this military catastrophe—unparalleled in history—became even more pressing and even more complex.

Strictly speaking, this discussion began many years before the final collapse of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. We are not quite so "lazy and uncurious" (Pushkin) that, among the hundreds of thousands of living witnesses to the dramatic events of those years, there were no people willing to question the veracity of the official nonsense. As early as the time of Khrushchev's "Thaw," certain figures, facts, and documents fluttered out of the impenetrable darkness of military secrecy into the light of day; once these were made public, it became downright indecent to continue peddling the old lies. One cannot fail to mention, for example, Dashichev's two-volume monograph *The Bankruptcy of German Fascism's Strategy*. Although the entire work was devoted to German history and the author prudently avoided any comparisons, any reader with eyes and a brain would have had their last doubts dispelled regarding the "Wehrmacht's overwhelming superiority in tanks and aviation."

Nekrich and Grigorenko went even further. With a huge number of caveats, apologies, and justifications, they nevertheless wrote in black and white that the Wehrmacht had no numerical or technical superiority over the Red Army. For one of them, this ended in expulsion from the USSR; for the other, confinement in a special psychiatric hospital run by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In the era of "new thinking," Viktor Suvorov carried on their work. With the skill of a talented publicist and the fierce determination of a man who had finally discovered the one and only truth, V. Suvorov, in his trilogy (*The Icebreaker*, *Day-M*, "The Last Republic"), left no stone unturned in dismantling the false myth of Stalin's "quiet, peaceful, and almost unarmed" empire. It is truly astonishing and admirable that, without access to even a fraction of the vast body of documents that became available in the early 1990s, V. Suvorov was able to uncover and convincingly demonstrate to readers the many

years of preparation for the Great March into Europe, which constituted the meaning and purpose of all of Stalin's foreign and domestic policies.

It is difficult to understand why, but V. Suvorov filled his books with a huge number of hasty, frivolous, and—most importantly—irrelevant assertions (all sorts of "assault tanks," Su-2 super-bombers, destroyed pillboxes along the old Soviet border, and so on). All these "highway tanks" and "flying jackals" made Suvorov's books—books that merely marked the first steps toward the formation of a truly scientific historiography of the Great Patriotic War—extremely vulnerable to malicious and biased criticism. And yet, despite a host of specific errors and inaccuracies, V. Suvorov wrote books that EVERYONE UNDERSTOOD.

He was understood by millions of readers, for whom the question of Comrade Stalin's plans and intentions is now and forever settled and off the table; he was understood by former Soviet (now Russian) propaganda historians, for whom V. Suvorov has become nothing short of a personal enemy, and for whose discrediting they are prepared to resort to any form of meanness. Suvorov was also perfectly understood by professors at Western European (as well as North American) universities, who year after year lazily rewrote their fly-specked lecture notes—after the publication of *The Icebreaker*, their entire academic reputation and lofty titles found themselves under threat of complete devaluation. It is not surprising that on both sides of the Atlantic, a "conspiracy of silence" quickly took shape, through which the "priests of historical science"—long incapable of serious and honest discussion—attempted (to tell the truth, completely to no avail) to surround V. Suvorov's books.

At the same time, one cannot fail to acknowledge that, having shattered the old myths of communist propaganda, V. Suvorov was quick to replace them with new ones in one—albeit very important—aspect. It turns out that the Red Army was great and mighty—but only until 3:00 a.m. on June 22, 1941. The next day, it was allegedly bled dry and disarmed by a surprise attack from Hitler's forces. From the pages of Suvorov's trilogy, the triumphant song of the First Disarming Strike simply pours forth:

"...in the surprise attack, Soviet tank crews were shot down before they could even reach their tanks, and the tanks were burned or captured without their crews... A surprise strike on airfields blinds the tank divisions... Soviet reconnaissance planes cannot take to the skies... Our Cyclops has had an eye gouged out.

Our Cyclops is blind. He swings his steel fists and roars in helpless rage..." And so on.

For added persuasiveness, Suvorov offered his own, far more plausible, explanation for the cause of this debacle: the Red Army was itself preparing for an attack and, allegedly, therefore forgot all caution. Compared to the mockingly foolish version put forward by communist "historians" (about how the timid and naive Stalin was afraid to give Hitler a "pretext for invasion"), Suvorov's erroneous hypothesis seems quite plausible. As a result, both "Suvorovian" legends gained widespread circulation: both the one about the "Wehrmacht's first disarming strike" and the one claiming that the Red Army's defeat was due to the fact that troops—who had been trained, armed, and prepared for offensive operations—were forced to switch to a defensive posture on June 22, 1941.

As a side note, V. Suvorov was by no means the first to engage in this kind of myth-making. Grigorenko himself wrote as early as 1967 about how the "foolish" People's Commissar of Defense, Timoshenko, obeyed the even more "foolish" Stalin and moved all the artillery westward on the afternoon of June 22. They should have waited until dark—but they moved it out of the camps and shelters in broad daylight. That's when the enemy air force swooped down on it. And destroyed it. All

of it. All sixty thousand guns and mortars. Every German bomber (and there were nine hundred of them across the entire Eastern Front), sweeping over the ground like a mythical Valkyrie from the ancient Scandinavian sagas, destroyed one Soviet artillery regiment at a time...

Later, armed with a pencil and a calculator, we will examine in detail what the German air force could have done, what it actually did, and what it could not have done. For now, let's turn to simple common sense and ask it a couple of straightforward questions.

Why do "Hitler's falcons" themselves know nothing about their greatest achievement? Mountains of books have been written on the history of the Luftwaffe. There are monographs devoted to the combat use of specific aircraft types, and there are in-depth studies of the combat history of nearly every aviation squadron—all written with German meticulousness, including the exact serial numbers of every aircraft and the military ranks of all crew members. But as for how, on June 22, 1941, they "disarmed" the entire Red Army—not a word. And even that lying Dr. Goebbels never said a thing about it to anyone!

On the other hand, why didn't our own "falcons" do anything of the sort? No, of course, we're not talking about June '41. Back then, we didn't have airplanes, but rather "hopelessly obsolete coffins," and pilots who supposedly had "only 6 hours of flight time." But in '43, '44, 45—when the numbering of Soviet air regiments had reached a thousand—why, then, wasn't the Wehrmacht disarmed, left without tanks, without artillery, without supply depots in a single day by a single mighty air strike? And why is there nothing like this in the history of the British Royal Air Force? Or the French, or the American?

The Americans bombed Germany (whose territory is smaller than that of our pre-war Western or Kyiv Military Districts) starting in the spring of 1943. The Americans dropped several kilotons of bombs on a single target in a single raid. On D-Day in Normandy, each Allied division was supported on average (according to calculations by the renowned American historian Taylor) by 260 combat aircraft—that is 10 times more than the number allocated to a single Wehrmacht division on June 22, 1941. And yet, even ten months later, in the spring of 1945, the Wehrmacht was still fighting—and by no means with kerosene bottles...

Well, seriously speaking, it's absurd to even discuss this. To destroy (or at least significantly weaken) the Red Army—which, at the start of the war, comprised 198 infantry, 13 cavalry, 61 tank, and 31 motorized divisions, 16 airborne brigades, and 10 anti-tank brigades, with a single preemptive strike in the pre-nuclear era was absolutely impossible. And even with 21st-century weaponry, accomplishing such a task would have required—given the dispersion of Soviet military capabilities across a vast theater of operations—a massive concentration of nuclear missile forces.

In reality, the main means of destruction available to the Wehrmacht in the summer of 1941 was artillery. The primary calibers were 75, 105, 150, and 210 mm. The maximum firing range was 10 to 20 kilometers. It is precisely these figures that determine the depth of the initial strike, which was possible in principle. Nine-tenths of the Soviet regiments and divisions were outside this zone on the morning of June 22, 50–500–5,000 km from the border, and therefore could not have been destroyed—even theoretically—on the first, second, or third day of the war. It is also worth noting that even the frenzied Führer did not demand such super-efficiency from his army. After all, the planned duration of the "Blitzkrieg" in Russia was measured in months, not days, and the plan was to crush the Red Army through "bold advances by tank wedges," not a single daring raid by "Junkers" aircraft.

The absurdity (unless it is intentional humor) of the theory about an “Army That Knows Only How to Attack” is quite obvious and, in and of itself, does not require a multi-page refutation. One certainly does not need to have graduated from the General Staff Academy to understand that an offensive is a far more complex form of combat than defense. It is complex precisely because an offensive places higher demands on the command and communications system, which in this case requires a flexible, rapid, and unconventional response to a rapidly evolving situation. It is just as impossible to imagine a command capable of organizing a successful, rapid offensive but unable to organize a positional defense on its own territory—a territory known down to every path—as it is to find a virtuoso jazz pianist who cannot play “The Dog’s Waltz” from sheet music.

Finally, a so-called “offensive” army, armed with the world’s best “offensive” tanks, can always resort to the very method of defense that has been considered the best throughout history—launching a counteroffensive itself. We can find countless examples of this in history, but the most striking, in our view, is the experience of the Israel Defense Forces. This army has never even attempted to adopt a positional defense—a strategy that would be suicidal given Israel’s geographical conditions (the minimum width of the territory within the boundaries of the 1947 UN resolution is 18 km). Both in 1967 and in 1973, the strategic task of defending the country against vastly superior enemy forces was achieved by launching a counteroffensive; moreover, in October 1973, this transition had to be carried out without any operational pause, immediately after attempts to contain the Egyptian army’s advance at the Suez Canal defensive line proved unsuccessful.

Did the Red Army attempt to act in a similar manner in the summer of 1941?

Absolutely—YES.

Even official “perestroika”-era historical scholarship was prepared to acknowledge that “the fascist strategy of the blitzkrieg was countered not by defense—including maneuver defense—with the widespread use of sudden and well-prepared counterattacks, but, in essence, by a strategy of lightning-fast defeat of the invading enemy.” (3)

As always, V. Suvorov expressed this same idea vividly and figuratively:

"The Red Army's response to the German invasion is not that of a hedgehog bristling with quills, but that of a massive crocodile that, even as it bleeds to death, tries to attack."

You couldn’t have put it better.

On the Northwestern Front, a series of Red Army counterattacks (near Šiauliai, Daugavpils, Ostrov, Velikie Luki, and Staraya Russa) continued from the very first days of the war until mid-August 1941.

On the main Western strategic front, along the Minsk–Smolensk–Moscow line, repeated, virtually nonstop attempts to launch a decisive counteroffensive continued throughout the summer, until September 10, when, finally, the troops of the Western, Reserve, and Bryansk Fronts, on orders from the Supreme Command, switched to a defensive posture.

A detailed analysis of all these offensive operations is beyond the scope of this book.

On the other hand, even a conscientious high school student should be familiar with the ultimate outcome of these counterattacks. These attempts to launch an offensive yielded nothing but the loss of

hundreds of regular divisions, tens of thousands of tanks, and aircraft. The Red Army proved incapable of launching an offensive just as it proved incapable of establishing a sustainable positional defense along such formidable natural lines as the Neman, Dnieper, Dniester, Southern Bug, and Western Dvina rivers.

This observation alone is enough to put an end to the entire debate about “offensive tanks” and “defensive aircraft” before it even begins. Nevertheless, a painstaking and detailed analysis of the Red Army’s first counterattacks can lead us to important conclusions about the true causes of its defeat. That is why the author decided to begin the book with a detailed analysis of the course and outcome of two offensive operations—specifically those about which one can, without straying from the truth, say that they were the Red Army’s most powerful counterattacks, best equipped with military hardware and commanding personnel.

There will be no sensationalism

“The service of the Muses brooks no haste.” Military history, even more so, brooks no hasty rush. The reader would do well to be patient. There will be no quick answers to the most complex questions. Nor will there be any of those sensational “documents” (which no one has ever seen) that have been so popular in recent years, shocking “revelations” from former Stalinist henchmen (recorded by who knows whom and when), or other cheap tabloid fodder.

The documentary basis for this book is the vast body of information that was declassified and introduced into scholarly circulation at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. The bibliography lists nearly two hundred titles, but the following five sources are, in fact, the key ones:

— “Declassified,” a statistical study compiled by Colonel General G.F. Krivosheev, head of the Military History Service of the General Staff, published in 1993;

— four volumes (Nos. 33, 34, 35, 36) of the previously classified “SBD” series (Collection of Combat Documents of the Great Patriotic War), compiled by Soviet military historians in 1956–1958;

— a two-volume collection of documents titled “Russia—20th Century: Documents, 1941,” published in 1998;

— the collection of documents “Soviet Aviation in the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945: In Figures,” compiled under the classification “Top Secret” by a large group of military historians in 1962;

— a collective monograph by Soviet military historians, “1941: Lessons and Conclusions,” published in 1992 under the auspices of the General Staff of the CIS Joint Armed Forces.

The source base used has a clear shortcoming: it is incomplete, fragmentary, and compiled primarily by the very people who, by virtue of their official and party duties, sought to conceal the truth about the circumstances and causes of the Red Army’s catastrophic defeat. An equally obvious and indisputable advantage of the sources used is their accessibility and verifiability. Strictly speaking, this book does not contain a single new document or fact. In a normal scholarly and historical context, such a statement would sound like a “verdict,” an admission of the book’s worthlessness and lack of substance. But here in Russia, everything is unique: a unique “path,” a country beyond comprehension, a shameful situation involving the completely unlawful classification of documents in military archives, and so on. And in this situation, it is precisely the use of those—and only those—documents

that the Communists themselves were careless enough to preserve and publish that becomes a huge advantage.

I'll say it again—the reader is in for a lot of work. Ahead of us lie hundreds of pages of complex text, saturated with figures, dates, division numbers, and tank gun calibers. Time and again, we will pause before every "well-known," "self-evident," and familiar assertion—as worn-out as a pair of trampled slippers—in order to reflect: what, in fact, lies behind these entrenched myths?

Part 1

TRYASINA

...THE OPERATION'S PLAN

On the evening of June 22, 1941—or, to be precise, at 9:15 p.m.—People's Commissar of Defense Timoshenko approved and forwarded Directive No. 3 to the command of the western districts (fronts) for execution.

This document, as is customary in a combat order, provided a brief assessment of the enemy's forces and plans:

"...the enemy is delivering its main strikes from the Suwałki salient toward Alytus and from the Zamość area toward the Vladimir-Volynsky and Radziechów fronts, with supporting strikes in the directions of Tilsit–Šiauliai and Siedlce–Volkovysk..."

and set the immediate objectives for June 23–24:

"...to encircle and destroy the enemy's Suwałki group through concentric, concentrated strikes by the forces of the Northwestern and Western Fronts, and to capture the Suwałki area by the end of June 24;

with powerful concentrated strikes by mechanized corps, the entire air force of the Southwestern Front, and other units of the 5th and 6th Armies, to encircle and destroy the enemy group advancing in the direction of Volodymyr-Volynskyi and Brody. By the end of June 24, to capture the Lublin area" (6, p. 440).

As a side note, this document alone allows us to draw a well-founded conclusion about the worth of the glorious "Chekists'" years-long boasting that documents from the German high command allegedly reached Stalin's desk half an hour earlier than they reached Hitler's. In the six months that had passed since Hitler signed the "Barbarossa" plan, the Soviet military leadership had still not learned that the Wehrmacht's most powerful strike would be delivered by Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group along the Brest–Slutsk–Minsk line. This direction was not even mentioned in Directive No. 3 as a secondary one. And what our command regarded as a "secondary attack in the Tilsit–Šiauliai direction" was in fact the beginning of the main forces of Army Group North's offensive against Pskov–Leningrad.

By the time Directive No. 3 was received and decoded at the Western Front headquarters, the military situation had changed significantly.

By the end of the day on June 22, 1941, the advance units of the Wehrmacht's 3rd Panzer Group had penetrated 60–70 km into Soviet territory and crossed the Neman River (more precisely, they crossed it

via three undamaged bridges near Alytus and Merkine) (see Map No. 1). But no matter how strong the Germans' offensive momentum was, and no matter how weak the resistance of the 11th Army of the Northwestern Front was, roads and bridges have a very specific capacity, and tanks in columns move at intervals of several tens of meters. As a result, when on the morning of June 24 the Wehrmacht's 7th Panzer Division occupied Vilnius, and the 20th and 12th Panzer Divisions were approaching Oshmyany, the rearguard of the tank group—the 19th Panzer Division and the 14th Motorized Division—was still only crossing the Neman River (13). Thus, what military historians usually refer to as the "German tank wedge" consisted in those days of several "steel threads" stretching 100–200 km along the roads of southwestern Lithuania. Meanwhile, the German infantry—which was literally marching on foot—along with its horse-drawn supply trains and horse-drawn artillery, had only just begun to erect pontoon bridges across the Neman.

The regulations require that a subordinate of any rank or position, while unconditionally carrying out the task assigned to him by a superior commander, exercise reasonable initiative in choosing the most effective ways and methods of executing the order. This is precisely how the commander of the Western Front, Hero of the Soviet Union, recipient of three Orders of Lenin and two Orders of the Red Star, Army General D.G. Pavlov, acted. Departing from a strict adherence to the "letter" of Directive No. 3, he redirected the thrust of the offensive from the northwestern direction (from Grodno toward Suwałki) directly northward, along the western bank of the Neman River, from Grodno toward Merkine. The plan of the operation was ingeniously simple. A rapid strike (two days in time and 80–90 km in distance) against the flank and rear of the enemy infantry advancing westward, the capture of bridges and crossings over the Neman River—and the trap into which the Wehrmacht's 3rd Tank Group had driven itself would snap shut. Cut off from all supply lines and deprived of support from their own infantry, the German tank divisions that had broken through to Vilnius were surrounded and destroyed.

As a side note, eleven months later, in May 1942, the Germans carried out an operation based on exactly the same plan. At that time, during the now infamous Kharkiv Offensive, Soviet troops crossed the Seversky Donets River and reached the outskirts of Kharkiv. Meanwhile, the German Kleist Panzer Army crossed the same river near the town of Izyum (100 km south of Kharkiv) and, advancing northward along the eastern, virtually undefended bank of the Seversky Donets, cut off the lines of communication for the Soviet troops, who ultimately found themselves encircled on the western bank of the Donets. The result was the encirclement and rout of five Soviet armies, with more than 200,000 Red Army soldiers and commanders taken prisoner by the Germans. The operation conceived by Pavlov could not have ended in such a massive success—simply because the German 3rd Panzer Group did not number 200,000, or even 100,000 men. But in every other respect, the offensive by the Western Front's strike group was, as they say, "doomed to succeed."

Thanks to the "line demarcating the state interests of the USSR and Germany on the territory of the former Polish state," which had been prudently drawn in September 1939 (which was the official name for what all Soviet books and textbooks refer to as the "western border"), the Western Front's Bialystok military group, without having fired a single shot, was already looming over the flank and rear of the German troops, who were pinned down in the cramped "patch" of the Suwalki Salient. The wise Stalin had seen to that. And nature had ensured that the Neman River turned 90 degrees near Grodno, thereby "clearing" the way for Soviet tanks advancing from Białystok toward Merkine. There are simply no other major rivers in this area that the defending German infantry could use as a line of defense.

Because Pavlov refused to launch an offensive against the city of Suwałki—which the Germans had occupied in 1939—and instead decided to encircle and destroy the enemy's Suwałki group on Soviet territory, the Germans were deprived of the opportunity to rely on anti-tank defenses that had been

prepared in advance by engineers. It goes without saying that in an area the Germans had occupied only one or two days earlier, they had neither minefields, nor anti-tank trenches, nor reinforced concrete pillboxes—nor could they have had any.

The Western Front's strike force included two mechanized corps and one cavalry corps (in terms of troop strength, this formation was equivalent to a single rifle division). Thus, a "cavalry-mechanized group" (abbreviated as KMG, according to the military terminology then in use in the Red Army) was formed. Pavlov entrusted command of the cavalry-mechanized group to his deputy, Lieutenant General Boldin. At 11:40 p.m. in Białystok, at the headquarters of the Western Front's most powerful 10th Army (where Lieutenant General Boldin had by then arrived from Minsk), an order from Pavlov was received, according to which the KMG, consisting of the 6th Mechanized Corps, the 11th Mechanized Corps, and the 6th Cavalry Corps, was to "launch an attack in the general direction of Białystok, Lipsk, and south of Grodno with the objective of destroying the enemy on the left (i.e., western. — M.S.) bank of the Neman River and, by the end of June 24, 1941, capture Merkine."

At this point, perhaps, it is time to interrupt the chronological account of the events of June 1941 in order to explain to the reader what the term "mechanized corps" actually means.

World War II can, to a large extent, be called a "tank war." It was precisely powerful tank formations that became the main instrument for conducting large-scale offensive operations during that era. And since we have decided to ascertain the actual offensive capabilities of the Red Army as of 1941, we cannot do so without taking a closer look at the Soviet mechanized corps.

All mechanized corps of the Red Army had a uniform structure. A mechanized corps consisted of:

— two tank divisions;

— a motorized division;

— a separate motorcycle regiment;

— numerous special units (a separate communications battalion, a separate motorized engineer battalion, a corps aviation squadron, etc.).

In essence, the mechanized corps consisted of three "tank" divisions, since a Soviet motorized division included a tank regiment and, in terms of its authorized strength (275 tanks), surpassed a German tank division. In reality, the difference between a motorized division and a tank division lay in their names and their different structures—that is, in the different ratio of tank units to motorized infantry units. A tank division had four regiments: two tank regiments, one motorized infantry regiment, and one artillery regiment. A motorized division also had four regiments: two motorized infantry regiments, a tank regiment, and an artillery regiment. In addition, each division had its own signals battalion, reconnaissance battalion, pontoon-bridge battalion, anti-aircraft artillery battery, and numerous engineering units.

A separate anti-tank destroyer company was also prudently included in the motorized division's composition (in case of an encounter with enemy tanks).

It is clear that, by developing this specific structure, the Soviet command sought to ensure that the corps as a whole possessed maximum operational autonomy. The corps commander had at his disposal:

— a powerful armored “battering ram” consisting of five tank regiments;

— its own artillery group (three mechanized artillery regiments capable of breaking through enemy defenses in the breakthrough sector);

— mechanized “light cavalry” (a corps motorcycle regiment);

— its own infantry (four motorized rifle regiments capable of securing captured territory and covering the advancing tank wedge from the flanks and rear).

The mechanized corps also had its own air defense, communications, and reconnaissance units. It even had its own reconnaissance aviation—a corps aviation squadron armed with 15 U-2 and R-5 aircraft (the ultralight U-2 biplane, as is well known, could take off and land in any forest clearing, thereby radically solving the age-old problem of “lack of communication”). To ensure high mobility for all units of the mechanized corps, its authorized strength called for 5,165 vehicles (of all types, including tanker trucks) and 352 tracked tractors for towing artillery and evacuating damaged tanks from the battlefield.

After numerous changes to the authorized strength, the mechanized corps’ armament was to include 1,031 tanks, namely: 126 KV tanks, 420 T-34 tanks, 316 BTs, 152 T-26s (including 108 flamethrower variants), and 17 T-38/T-40 amphibious machine-gun tanks. In addition, the Mechanized Corps was equipped with a type of armored vehicle (not found in the Wehrmacht) such as wheeled gun-mounted armored cars, totaling 152 BA-10s. This vehicle was based on a three-axle off-road truck and armed with a 45-mm 20K tank gun in a standard tank turret; in terms of firepower, the BA-10 thus surpassed the German light tanks Pz.I, Pz.II, Pz.III(1), Rg-Sh (early production models with a 37-mm gun), which by the summer of 1941 still accounted for 60% of the Wehrmacht’s tank units. The mechanized corps also had in service light armored vehicles armed with machine guns (BA-20), based on a passenger car. The overall distribution of the mechanized corps’ armored vehicles is shown in the table:

KV T-34 BT-7 T-26 T-38/T-40 BA-10 BA-20

tank 63 210 26 76 0 56 39

td 63 210 26 76 0 56 39'

MD 0 0 258 0 17 18 . _ . 33 _,

Infantry Subunits 0 0 6 0 0 22 5

TOTAL 126,420 316,152 17,152 116

In total, the mechanized corps had 1,299 armored vehicles on its roster. If all the armored vehicles of the mechanized corps were lined up in a single column with a standard marching interval of 15 meters between vehicles, the result would be a “steel ribbon” 25 kilometers long!

The fact that the Mechanized Corps was armed with 126 KV heavy tanks and 420 T-34 medium tanks means, among other things, that it had 546 76.2-mm artillery barrels. In addition to tank guns, the mechanized corps also included “conventional” artillery towed by special tracked artillery tractors (or

powerful tractors): 76.2-mm guns and 122-mm and 152-mm howitzers. The corps' artillery systems were distributed as follows:

76.2 mm 122 mm ⏐ 152 mm

and 4 12

and 4 12

MD 16 16 12

Total 24 40 36

Overall, the combined weight of the mechanized corps' artillery salvo (not even accounting for the firepower of half a thousand 45-mm guns in the turrets of light tanks and heavy armored vehicles) was just under 6 metric tons, which was four times that of a corresponding Wehrmacht infantry division. It is also worth noting the ratio of guns (100 units) to mechanized towing vehicles (352 tracked tractors), not to mention the fact that the KV and T-34 tanks themselves, with their 500-silny diesel engines, could tow a divisional "three-inch" (weighing 1.5 metric tons) or a 122-mm howitzer (weighing 2.5 metric tons) as if it were a "feather."

The tactical and technical characteristics of the new Soviet T-34 and KV tanks—unique for their time (anti-shell armor, powerful armament, a diesel engine, high cross-country mobility, and a long range)—collectively signified the creation of a fundamentally new instrument of warfare. The T-34 and KV were capable of independently (without waiting for heavy artillery to arrive) suppressing enemy firepower on the front line, and then supporting the infantry with precision fire as they broke through enemy defenses to the full tactical depth.

In December 1940, at a well-known meeting of the Red Army's senior command, General D. Pavlov—the future commander of the Western Front (and at that time, chief of the Red Army's Main Armored Directorate)—reported with a sense of justifiable pride in his army:

"...Tank corps, supported by massive airpower, break through the enemy's defensive line, shatter its anti-tank defenses, destroy its artillery along the way, and advance into the operational depth. Motorized infantry and rifle corps rush forward behind the tank corps with their own tanks... Under such conditions, we believe that at least a couple of tank corps in the direction of the main attack will need to deliver a devastating blow within a couple of hours and cover the entire tactical depth of approximately 30–35 km. This requires the massive deployment of tanks and aircraft; and with new types of tanks, this is possible...

...If suppressing a single machine-gun nest in a field environment requires 120 rounds from a 76-mm gun or 80 rounds from a 122-mm howitzer, then I ask you to calculate how many rounds a tank would need to fire to destroy a single machine-gun nest? Either none, or 2–3 shells from a distance of 1–1.5 km. A 122-mm howitzer is typically used to destroy an anti-tank gun. It takes 70–90 shells. I ask you: how many shells would a heavy tank need to neutralize a single anti-tank gun? Either none, or a single shot... I maintain that having a large number of heavy tanks will greatly assist the artillery in its work and reduce shell consumption..." (14).

In February 1941, a decision was made to form TWENTY-NINE such mechanized corps, which meant

deploying tank forces twice as large as those of the armies of Germany, England, Italy, and the United States combined. Alas, even Hitler—though he was considered a “mad corporal”—had enough sense not to wait, but to strike first. To strike before Stalin could fully equip all twenty-nine of his mechanized corps down to the last nut and bolt. As a result, the mechanized corps that actually saw combat were by no means like those described above.

“We miscalculated the objective capabilities of our tank industry,” Marshal G.K. Zhukov laments bitterly in his memoirs, “to fully equip the mechanized corps, 16,600 tanks of only the new types were required... there was simply no way to obtain such a number of tanks within a single year under practically any circumstances” (15). It is surprising how the former Chief of the General Staff could have forgotten the program for deploying mechanized corps that he himself had approved on February 22, 1941.

There were no plans to create tank forces of such an astronomical size “within a single year.”

All mechanized corps were divided into 19 “combat” corps, 7 “reduced” corps, and 4 “second-line reduced” corps. In total, by the end of 1941, it was planned to have 18,804 tanks in the mechanized corps and two separate tank divisions, including 16,655 tanks in the “combat” mechanized corps (16, p. 677). In terms of numbers, there was no problem with staffing these mechanized corps: as of January 1, 1941, the Red Army already had more than 20,000 tanks on its roster. But these were “obsolete” (outdated compared to the latest KV and T-34 tanks, not at all compared to the enemy’s tanks!) T-26 and BT light tanks, and a full rearmament of all 29 mechanized corps with new tanks would have required 3,654 KV tanks and 12,180 T-34 tanks.

The production program was planned in accordance with the actual capabilities of the USSR’s massive military-industrial complex and was successfully carried out. In 1941, 1,358 KV tanks and 3,014 T-34 tanks were produced.

The following year, in 1942, the Soviet tank industry produced 24,718 tanks, including 2,553 KV and 12,527 T-34 (1, p. 598). Total: 3,911 KV and 15,541 T-34 tanks over two years. Moreover, this production volume was achieved under “conditions” that, in February 1941, Zhukov and Stalin could have only imagined in a nightmare: two of the most important enterprises (the world’s largest tank factory, No. 183, and the country’s sole manufacturer of tank diesel engines, Factory No. 75) had to be relocated from Kharkiv to the Urals under bombardment, while two .huge Leningrad factories (No. 185, named after Kirov, and No. 174, named after Voroshilov) found themselves surrounded by the blockade, and the main producer of armored hulls, the shipyard in Mariupol, was captured by the Germans. There is no reasonable basis to doubt that, under normal conditions, Soviet industry would have been able to ensure the re-equipment of the mechanized corps by the end of 1942—just as had been planned.

Having put an end to the debates and predictions, let us turn to an assessment of what actually happened. By the start of hostilities, the 20 mechanized corps deployed in the five western border districts had 11,000 tanks. Another 2,000 tanks were part of three mechanized corps (the 5th, 7th, and 21st) and the separate 57th Tank Division, which were already committed to battle in the first two weeks of the war near Shepetovka, Lepel, and Daugavpils. Thus, Zhukov had to begin the war with “only” a four-to-one numerical superiority in tanks. This is a very conservative estimate—that is, it does not take into account the tanks in service with cavalry divisions and troops in the interior military districts. In total, as of June 1, 1941, the Red Army had 19,540 tanks (again, not counting the light amphibious T-37/T-38/T-40 tanks and the T-27 tankettes) and 3,258 armored gun carriages (1, p. 601).

The distribution of available tanks among the mechanized corps was extremely uneven. Some corps (1st, 5th, 6th) were almost fully equipped, while others (17th, 20th) had fewer than a hundred tanks. The composition of the tank fleet was equally heterogeneous. Most mechanized corps had no new tanks (T-34, KV) at all; some (the 10th, 19th, and 18th) were armed with extremely worn-out BT-2/BT-5 tanks manufactured in 1932–1934, or even light tankettes such as the T-37/T-38. At the same time, there were mechanized corps equipped with hundreds of the very latest tanks.

At first glance, it is difficult to grasp the internal logic behind such a formation. But one need only plot the locations of the mechanized corps on a map of the Soviet Union's border regions for the plan behind the impending "Thunderstorm" to reveal itself in all its glory.

As noted above, the western border of the USSR had two deep (120–170 km) salients, their tips pointing toward German-occupied Poland: the Białystok salient in Western Belarus and the Lviv salient in Western Ukraine. These two salients were inevitably accompanied by four "depressions." From north to south, these "depressions" at the bases of the salients were located in the areas around the cities of Grodno, Brest, Volodymyr-Volynskyi, and Chernivtsi. If the Red Army had intended to take up defensive positions, only minimal covering forces would have been left at the tips of the salients, while the main defensive formations would have been deployed at their bases, in the "depressions." Such a deployment would have guaranteed that friendly troops would not be encircled within the salients, reduced the total length of the defensive front (the base of a triangle is always shorter than the sum of its other two sides), and created the greatest operational density along the most likely directions of an enemy offensive.

In reality, everything was done exactly the opposite. The main strike formations were "crowded together" at the tips of the Białystok and Lviv salients. At the bases of the salients, in the areas of Grodno, Brest, and Chernivtsi, incomparably weaker forces were deployed. Describing the entire formation would take up too much of our time and space, so we will limit ourselves to examining the deployment of the "five giants"—five mechanized corps, each equipped with between 700 and 1,000 tanks, including more than 100 of the latest T-34 and KV tanks, hundreds of tractors (towing vehicles), and thousands of motor vehicles. These are (listed from north to south) the 3rd Mechanized Corps, the 6th Mechanized Corps, the 15th Mechanized Corps, the 4th Mechanized Corps, and the 8th Mechanized Corps.

Even among these, the best of the best, the 6th (which was to become part of Boldin's Mechanized Corps) and the 4th Mechanized Corps (whose combat operations will be discussed in Part 2 of this book) stand out. At the start of the war, they were armed with 452 and 414 of the latest tanks, respectively—more than all the other mechanized corps of the Red Army combined. By the start of hostilities, the 6th Mechanized Corps had 1,131 tanks (i.e., even more than its authorized strength), 294 tractors, and, in terms of the number of motor vehicles and motorcycles (4,779 and 1,042, respectively), it surpassed any other mechanized corps of the Red Army.

Where were these "giants" stationed? The 4th Mechanized Corps was deployed at the very tip of the salient, in the Lviv area. Nearby, slightly to the south, the 8th Mechanized Corps was stationed (859 tanks, including 171 of the latest T-34s and KV tanks, 359 tractors and tow trucks, and 3,237 vehicles). Slightly east of Lviv, in the Zolochiv–Kremenets area, was the 15th Mechanized Corps (716 tanks, including 136 T-34s and KVs, 165 tractors and tow trucks, and 2,035 vehicles). Without having fired a single shot, the strike force—composed of three mechanized corps—was already looming over the flank and rear of the German troops of Army Group South, which were pinned down between the

Vistula and Bug rivers (see Map No. 3).

Even more telling was the choice of location for the 6th Mechanized Corps, which was hidden deep within the dense forests near Białystok. One can guess how the mechanized corps, with all its vast "logistics," ended up in Białystok—a railroad line runs to this city "and to Grodno, through centuries-old forests and bottomless swamps." The corps could leave Białystok under its own power in only one direction—westward, along the highway to Warsaw, which was just 80 km from the border. To the east of Białystok lies a vast, impassable forest (the Supraśl Forest). There was no major highway leading from Białystok deep into Soviet territory (and, consequently, no reason to expect an offensive by the enemy's main forces there) at that time, and there still isn't one to this day.

The location of the 3rd Mechanized Corps (672 tanks, including 128 T-34s and KVs; 162 BA-10 gun armored cars—the highest number among all mechanized corps; 308 tractors and tow trucks; and 3,897 vehicles) is also quite noteworthy. This corps was subordinate to the 11th Army, deployed in southern Lithuania at the junction of the Northwestern and Western Fronts. The border line in the area of this junction resembled a long, narrow "tongue" that extended from the Polish city of Suwałki deep into Soviet territory near Grodno. In fact, the Wehrmacht's 3rd Panzer Group (four tank and three motorized divisions) and four infantry corps were deployed within this Suwałki salient. Along the entire length of the Soviet-German front, there was no other area with such a high concentration of German troops. The Soviet command may not have been aware of this, but the very shape of the border near Grodno was a cause for great concern. Nevertheless, the 3rd Mechanized Corps was positioned significantly north of Grodno, in the Kaunas area (see Map No. 1). This was a strange decision for repelling a highly probable enemy attack from Suwałki toward Grodno, but it was very understandable and rational for an offensive westward, toward Tilsit and further on to the Baltic coast.

Meanwhile, right near Grodno was the under-strength 11th Mechanized Corps (331 tanks, including three dozen T-34s and KVs, 55 tractors and tow trucks, and 920 motor vehicles). The 14th Mechanized Corps was armed only slightly better (518 light T-26 tanks, not a single medium or heavy tank); in the early days of the war, it was struck at the southern base of the Białystok salient, in the Brest–Kobrin area, by the 2nd Panzer Group under Guderian—the most powerful unit in the entire Wehrmacht.

Digressing slightly from the "tank topic," it is worth noting that heavy artillery regiments (corps and 1st Army Corps) were deployed in a similar manner (with their main forces positioned at the tip of the salient facing the enemy). Thus, the 3rd Army, which was covering the Grodno sector, had only two corps artillery regiments (the 152nd and 444th) and not a single Army Group artillery regiment, while the 10th Army (the tip of the Bialystok salient) had four corps regiments (the 30th, 156th, 262nd, and 315th) and three RGK artillery regiments (311th, 124th, and 175th).

Returning to the evening of June 22, 1941, we can conclude that Boldin's Cavalry-Mechanized Group included four tank and two motorized divisions, armed with more than 1,500 tanks and 200 gun-mounted armored cars, approximately 5,700 vehicles, and 350 tractors. In addition, on June 23, the 124th Reserve Howitzer Regiment of the First Front Command, consisting of 48 heavy guns, was incorporated into Boldin's Cavalry-Mechanized Group to provide artillery support for the offensive (in terms of total artillery firepower, one such regiment was one and a half times more powerful than a Wehrmacht infantry division). Of the total 1,500 tanks, one-third (more than 470 units) were the latest medium and heavy tanks equipped with diesel engines and powerful armament (a long-barreled 76-mm gun could penetrate the frontal armor of any German tank at a range of 800–1,000 m) and reliable armor protection.

A comparison of the composition of Boldin's Tank Group with the strength of Soviet tank armies during the final period of the Great Patriotic War is quite revealing. For example, prior to the start of the Berlin Offensive, the four tank armies (the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Guards Tank Armies) had 709, 672, 572, and 395 tanks, respectively. Three tank armies (the 1st, 3rd, and 4th) began the Lviv-Sandomierz Offensive (July–August 1944) with 419, 490, and 464 tanks, respectively. On the eve of the major Vistula-Oder Offensive, in January 1945, Lelyushenko's 4th Tank Army had a total of only 680 tanks and self-propelled guns, and the 5th Guards Tank Army had only 590 tanks and self-propelled guns (167) before the start of the East Prussian Operation (January 1945). In other words, not a single one of the Soviet tank armies that victoriously ended the war in 1945 had even half the number of armored vehicles that had been placed at General Boldin's disposal!

In June 1941, this entire gigantic steel armada was supposed to descend upon five Wehrmacht infantry divisions: the 162nd and 256th Infantry Divisions of the 20th Army Corps, and the 8th, 28th, and 161st Infantry Divisions of the 8th Army Corps. In reality, by the morning of June 24, only two infantry divisions of the 20th Army Corps were in the area of General Boldin's planned counterattack, while three divisions of the 8th Army Corps had already crossed the Neman River and were advancing in the sector from Grodno to Druskininkai in the general direction of Lida, moving eastward along three nearly parallel routes (61, 78). Thus, during its advance north of Grodno toward Merkine, the KMG had a unique opportunity to destroy the enemy in piecemeal fashion through a series of successive strikes against its flanks and rear.

Consequently, in the first days of the war, a situation would arise that corresponded exactly (although Soviet historians have always assured us otherwise) to the prewar calculations of the Red Army command. Here is another excerpt from the aforementioned report, "The Use of Mechanized Units in Modern Offensive Operations," which Pavlov presented at the December 1940 meeting of senior commanders:

"...In terms of its capabilities—in terms of armament, manpower, and striking power—a tank corps is equivalent to five German infantry divisions. And since that is the case, we have the right and the duty to assign the tank corps the task of destroying 1–2 tank divisions or 4–5 infantry divisions. Why do I say 4–5 with such confidence? Simply because a tank corps, given its scope, will never have to fight simultaneously against all five of these divisions that have deployed and directed their firepower against it. It will, apparently, destroy these five divisions one after another through a series of strikes..." (14).

What could the German infantry have set against this in June 1941? Nothing, or almost nothing. The main armament of an anti-tank battalion in a Wehrmacht infantry division was a 37-mm gun capable of penetrating 30–35 mm of armor at a range of 500 meters. This was quite sufficient for combating light Soviet tanks such as the BT or T-26. But after their very first encounters with our new tanks, German soldiers nicknamed their anti-tank gun the "door knocker" (the point of this dark humor was that it could only tap on the armor of the Soviet T-34). The German 37-mm gun could not penetrate the sloped 45-mm armor plate of our T-34, even when firing from an extremely close range of 200 meters. As for its ability to engage the heavy KV tank (90 mm frontal armor, 75 mm side armor), there's no need to even mention it. This 48-metric-ton steel monster could plow through the battle formations of a German anti-tank division practically unhindered, as if on a training range. It is by no means a coincidence that by November 1, 1941, the Wehrmacht had lost 2,479 37-mm anti-tank guns on the Eastern Front—1.42 times more than the combined losses of all divisional and corps-level artillery systems (with calibers ranging from 75 to 150 mm inclusive) (171, p. 381).

It was only in the summer of 1940 that the Germans began production of the 50-mm Rak-38 anti-tank gun, which entered service with the Wehrmacht at a rate of two per infantry regiment; however, by the summer of 1941, not every infantry division was equipped with these guns! The state-of-the-art long-barreled (60-caliber barrel) Rak-38 anti-tank gun was one of the best in the world, but even it could not penetrate the frontal armor of the 48-metric-ton KV monster. The only possible tactic for fighting the KV was to fire at its side, from an ambush, at the closest possible range. Although the T-34's frontal hull plate was "only" 45 mm thick (the cast turret had wall thicknesses of 52 mm), it was mounted at an unusually steep angle (60 degrees), which, even purely geometrically, increased the effective armor thickness to 90 mm. In practice, however, such a steep angle of the armor plate usually caused an armor-piercing projectile to ricochet. The best German anti-tank gun could only penetrate the T-34 by firing at close range at the hull's side (armor thickness—40 mm, angle of inclination—40 degrees).

That said, neither the T-34 nor the KV was a "wonder weapon." Of course, there is no such thing as a completely invulnerable tank, and the very term "anti-shell armor" is a convention. Shells come in many different varieties. The German 105-mm gun (not to be confused with a howitzer!) accelerated a 15.2-kg shell to a velocity of 835 m/s, yielding kinetic energy 27 times greater than the muzzle energy of even the heaviest 37-mm antitank gun. The heavy (combat weight 5.2 metric tons) 88-mm anti-aircraft gun also possessed high energy (projectile weight 9 kg at an initial velocity of 820 m/s), which theoretically allowed it to penetrate the frontal armor of a T-34, and under certain conditions, even that of a KV. However, all this "exotic" equipment had almost nothing to do with the actual organization of anti-tank defense.

According to the standard organization chart of a Wehrmacht infantry division, 105-mm guns were not included (these long-range guns were assigned to corps artillery battalions). As for the German 88-mm anti-aircraft guns, they were not present at all within Wehrmacht infantry (or tank or motorized) divisions, since all anti-aircraft batteries in the German armed forces were organizationally part of the Luftwaffe and were not under the command of "ground" commanders. The firing technique for a high-speed, high-altitude target has nothing in common with direct-fire engagement of a tank; the dimensions and weight of the 88-mm anti-aircraft gun (as well as the 105-mm gun weighing 5.6 metric tons)

are far from the requirements for a low-profile, highly mobile anti-tank gun. Finally, a high-explosive fragmentation anti-aircraft shell is practically useless for engaging an armored target.

Yes, indeed, in the summer of 1941, finding themselves in a desperate situation after encountering new Soviet tanks, the Germans were forced to resort to the most absurd improvisations, such as using 5-metric-ton mortars and long-range guns to fight tanks. Yes, using these weapons, German infantrymen could destroy a tank platoon (3 tanks) that happened to be in the vicinity of a heavy artillery firing position purely by chance. But repelling a massive tank attack with such means was out of the question —a battalion of T-34 or KV tanks (not to mention larger units) would simply have "run over" the heavy guns...

Not only did the military and political leadership of Nazi Germany fail to provide its army with reliable means of combating the new Soviet tanks, but it also managed to overlook the very fact of their introduction into service with the Red Army. Only after hostilities began, on June 25, 1941, did the following entry appear in the diary of F. Halder (Chief of the General Staff of the Army):

"...some data has been received on a new type of Russian heavy tank: weight—52 metric tons, side armor—8 cm... An 88-mm anti-aircraft gun apparently penetrates its side armor (this is not yet known

for certain)... Information has been received regarding the appearance of yet another tank, armed with a 75-mm gun and three machine guns...” (12).

In the memoirs of Gota and Guderian, the first reports of a “super-heavy Russian tank” (i.e., the KV) date only to early July 1941.

A discussion of how the military intelligence of an extremely aggressive state could have failed to notice, for half a year, the emergence of new types of tanks in mass production by Germany’s main potential adversary is beyond the scope of this book. That is a topic for a separate discussion. For the purposes of our investigation, however, it suffices to note that not only did German infantry divisions fail to receive new anti-tank guns in sufficient quantities, but the very appearance of enormous 50-metric-ton armored monsters emerging from the depths of the Belarusian forests must have come as a terrible surprise to them.

The element of surprise—the most crucial condition for success in war—was further amplified by the fact that German intelligence was also unable to detect in a timely manner the concentration of a powerful strike force in the Białystok area. The morning report from the headquarters of the 9th Army (Army Group “Center”) dated June 23, 1941, states verbatim: “Despite intensified reconnaissance, no large cavalry or tank forces have yet been detected in the Białystok area...” It was not until the evening of June 23 that a report from the intelligence and counterintelligence department of the Wehrmacht’s 9th Army headquarters noted “the appearance of the 1st and 2nd Motorized Mechanized Brigades in the area south of Grodno” (61). What does this mean? There were no “mechanized brigades” in the composition of the Western Front; among the six tank and motorized divisions of General Boldin’s Army Group G, there was not a single one numbered 1 or 2. The only thing that is clear is that, in the end, the Germans could not help but notice the movement of huge tank columns, but this happened literally just hours before the start of the Soviet counteroffensive.

However, the defeat of the German-fascist forces near Grodno and Vilnius never materialized.

NO WITNESSES

By and large, nothing happened at all.

“Due to the dispersion of the formations, the instability of command, and the powerful impact of enemy aviation, it was not possible to concentrate the strike force at the appointed time. The ultimate objectives of the counterattack (to destroy the enemy’s Suwalki group and capture Suwalki) were not achieved; there were heavy losses...”

Here is the verbatim account of the course and outcome of Boldin’s KMG counterattack, as presented in the most authoritative historical study of the “perestroika era” — the monograph “1941: Lessons and Conclusions,” compiled in 1992 by military historians of the General Staff (at that time still the “United Armed Forces of the CIS”). Behind the phrase “heavy losses” lies the fact that all three formations that took part in Boldin’s counterattack (the 6th Mechanized Corps, the 11th Mechanized Corps, and the 6th Cavalry Corps) were completely routed. All military equipment was abandoned in the forests and on the roads; most of the personnel were taken prisoner or killed; the few survivors, in small groups, spent several weeks and months breaking out of the encirclement and reached their own lines only after the front had already retreated to Rzhev and Vyazma.

In earlier seminal works by Soviet historians (the 12-volume *History of World War II* and the 6-

volume *History of the Great Patriotic War*), there was nothing at all other than a vague statement (|>fact that “the counterattacks by Soviet troops, as envisaged by Directive No. 3, proved ineffective.” In the widely known, now classic military-historical works by German generals (Tippelskirch, Butlar, Blumentritt), there is not a single word about a counterattack by Soviet troops in the Grodno area.

In G. Gota’s memoirs (“Tank Operations”), we find no mention of a Red Army offensive in the Grodno area. It seems that the commander of the Wehrmacht’s 3rd Tank Group never even learned that a massive enemy tank formation was targeting the flanks and rear of his troops.

A brief mention of combat operations in the area of the planned counterattack by Boldin’s KMG appears in F. Halder’s well-known *War Diary*, but only in the entries dated June 25, 1941: “The Russians, surrounded in the Białystok area, are launching attacks in an attempt to break out of the encirclement to the north toward Grodno... quite serious complications on the front of the 8th Army Corps, where large masses of Russian cavalry are attacking the corps’ western flank...” But by the evening of the same day (an entry dated 6:00 p.m. on June 25), Halder noted with satisfaction: “The situation south of Grodno has stabilized. The enemy’s attacks have been repelled...”

Halder never returns to describing these events later on, and this account seems rather strange—after all, the main striking force of the KMG was by no means “large masses of cavalry,” but rather two mechanized corps. It is not certain that these entries have any connection at all to the actions of Boldin’s KMG: “serious complications” were supposed to have arisen in the offensive sector of the Wehrmacht’s 20th Army Corps (162nd and 256th Infantry Divisions), which was set to face an avalanche of Soviet tanks, but Halder says nothing at all about this...

Most likely, the following entry (dated June 24, 1941) in the diary of Field Marshal von Bock, commander of Army Group Center, relates to the combat operations of Boldin’s KMG: “The Russians are putting up desperate resistance; there were strong counterattacks in the Grodno area against the 8th and 20th Army Corps...” A day later, in an entry dated June 26, Bock (just like Halder) notes: “The situation of the 20th Corps on the army’s right flank no longer gives cause for concern. In any case, it has not been ‘reduced to ashes,’ as some claimed yesterday, and is even in a fully combat-ready state. Be that as it may, such rumors indicate that the enemy was making desperate attempts to break out of the ‘cauldron’ (174, pp. 51, 54).

It is noteworthy that neither Halder nor Bock even mentions any participation by large tank formations in these counterattacks; moreover, the enemy itself regards the decisive counterattack planned in Moscow and Minsk against the flank and rear of the enemy’s Suwalki group as nothing more than “desperate attempts to break out of the ‘cauldron’...

As might be expected, Wehrmacht officers who were at much lower levels of the command hierarchy describe the events in more dramatic terms. What were merely local and temporary “complications” for the Chief of the General Staff or the commander of an Army Group were perceived as fierce battles at the regimental and battalion levels. Thus, in the history of the Wehrmacht’s 256th Infantry Division, we read:

“...At 2:00 a.m. on June 24, von Bornstedt’s advance units and the 481st Infantry Regiment managed to break through to Kuznitsa and capture the crossings over the Lososna (a forest stream, a western tributary of the Neman River—M.S.) intact. From that moment on, the fiercest fighting began for the bridgehead fortifications established by the division... On June 24 and 25, they had to repel heavy attacks by enemy tanks (Oberleutnant Pelikan, alone with his battery of “assault guns,” put 36 tanks out

of action)...” (175).

If this last statement is even half true, then the valiant Pelikan should have been awarded the Knight’s Cross at that very moment (most likely posthumously). The “assault gun” battery (Jigt-kehsiGg) consisted of only 6 (six) self-propelled guns, which were based on the chassis of the medium tank Pz.Kp.G-III, on which a short-barreled (24-caliber) 75-mm gun was mounted in a fixed armored turret. This gun was nicknamed “cigarette butt” in the Wehrmacht; due to its low muzzle velocity, its armor-penetration capabilities were inferior even to the 37-mm “hammer” or the Soviet 45-mm tank gun. However, the “assault gun” was not intended for fighting tanks—its mission was to provide fire support for the infantry. Operating directly within the battle formations of infantry units, “assault guns” were supposed to use their firepower and tracks to destroy enemy machine-gun nests, mortar batteries, dugouts, and bunkers; for firing at extremely close ranges at targets not protected by armor or concrete, a high muzzle velocity is unnecessary.

The “Okurok” could not penetrate the armor of a T-34 or KV even in theory, even when firing point-blank; therefore, the 36 Soviet tanks allegedly destroyed by Oberleutnant Pelikan’s battery could only have been light tanks such as the T-26 or BT, but even in combat against them, the “assault gun’s” chances were very slim: By definition, the “assault gun” lacks a rotating turret; consequently, to fire at a tank maneuvering on the battlefield, it had to turn its entire hull, inevitably exposing its 30-mm side armor to enemy fire—armor that a Soviet 45-mm tank gun could penetrate from a distance of one kilometer.... However, regardless of all these theoretical arguments, the loss of 36 light tanks in no way explains the complete rout of Boldin’s KMG, which (let’s repeat this once more) was armed with about 1,500 tanks.

If we were writing a fantasy horror novel, now would be the perfect time to describe how SOMETHING rose from the gloomy depths of the Belarusian swamps and swallowed the huge armored armada without a trace.

But the genre of this book is a documentary historical investigation, and unfortunately, we cannot attribute the defeat to “evil forces.”

And Boldin’s KMG did not disappear without a trace. “The entire length of the Białystok–Volkovysk road presents scenes of utter devastation. It is littered with hundreds of wrecked tanks, trucks, and artillery pieces of all calibers,” von Bock notes in his diary. An order signed by Field Marshal von Bock on July 8, 1941, states that the troops of Army Group Center “captured and destroyed 2,585 tanks, including the heaviest ones” (174, p. 74). According to accounts from local residents collected by enthusiasts from the Minsk search association “Batkovshina,” “by the end of June 1941, the area along the Nolkovysk–Slonim highway was littered with abandoned tanks, burned-out vehicles, and wrecked guns to such an extent that direct and detour traffic was impossible... Columns of prisoners stretched up to 10 km in length...” (8).

The description of columns of prisoners stretching for many kilometers may seem to some like the usual exaggeration of people who witnessed a massive catastrophe. Alas. Even according to a thoroughly conservative (in the best sense of the word) study by contemporary Russian military historians (“The Seal of Secrecy Has Been Lifted”), the Western Front’s irretrievable losses during the first 17 days of the war amounted to 341,000 men, while medical losses totaled 76,700 men (35, p. 163). Assuming the standard ratio of killed to wounded for all 20th-century wars—1 to 3—we arrive at a figure of 310,000–315,000 “missing in action,” i.e., prisoners of war and deserters. It is worth noting that these figures, derived purely by calculation, fully coincide with long-known German reports,

according to which the Wehrmacht took 288,000 prisoners during the battle in the Minsk–Białystok area.

The memoirs of Soviet generals could shed light on the reasons for the defeat of the KMG—but very few managed to write them. Major General I.S. Nikitin, commander of the 6th Cavalry Corps, was taken prisoner and shot by the Germans in a concentration camp in April 1942 (20, 124).

Major General E.S. Zybin, commander of the 36th Cavalry Division of the 6th Cavalry Corps, was taken prisoner, where he actively collaborated with the Nazis. Pursuant to a verdict by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, he was executed on August 25, 1946. He has not been rehabilitated to this day (20, 124).

The commander of the 6th Mechanized Corps, Khatskilevich, was killed on June 25. The circumstances of his death remain unknown to this day. A few days later, near the village of Klepachi in the Slonim District, an armored vehicle in which officers from the headquarters of the 6th Mechanized Corps were attempting to transport the body of their fallen commander was hit. During this incident, the corps' chief of artillery, Major General A.S. Mitrofanov, was mortally wounded.

Colonel E.S. Koval, Chief of Staff of the 6th Mechanized Corps, went missing in action.

The deputy commander of the 6th Mechanized Corps, Colonel D.G. Kononovich, went missing in action.

The commander of the 4th Tank Division of the 6th Mechanized Corps, Major General A.G. Potaturchev, was taken prisoner; after his release from the Dachau concentration camp, he was arrested by the NKVD and died in prison. He was posthumously rehabilitated in 1953 (20, 124).

Major General N.P. Bikzhanov, commander of the 29th Motorized Division of the 6th Mechanized Corps, was taken prisoner; after his release, he "underwent a special investigation by the NKVD" until December 1945. In April 1950, he was discharged "due to illness." He lived to be 93 years old but never published his memoirs.

Major General S. V. Borzilov, commander of the 7th Tank Division of the 6th Mechanized Corps, managed to break out of the encirclement after the defeat of the KMG; he was killed on September 28, 1941, during the battles for Crimea.

Mukhin, Chief of Staff of the 11th Mechanized Corps, went missing in action. Makarov, Deputy Commander of the 11th Mechanized Corps, and Starostin, Chief of Artillery of the corps, were taken prisoner and died in Nazi concentration camps.

Colonel N.P. Studnev, commander of the 29th Tank Division of the 11th Mechanized Corps, broke out of the encirclement and later died in combat in the summer of 1941.

Kalanchuk, chief of staff of the 29th Tank Division, was taken prisoner in early July 1941.

Colonel A.M. Pirov, commander of the 204th Motorized Division of the 11th Mechanized Corps, went missing in action in August 1941 (8, 20, 124).

As for the fate of the Western Front's high command, it was even more tragic.

The commander of the Western Front, Hero of the Defense of Madrid, and former chief of the Red Army's Main Armored Directorate, Army General D.G. Pavlov, was arrested on July 4 and, on July 22, 1941—exactly one month after the start of the war (Comrade Stalin certainly loved theatrical effects!) —was sentenced to execution by firing squad.

In the same case, for "cowardice, inaction, and panic, which created the possibility of an enemy breakthrough of the front" (67, 81), the following were executed:

— V.E. Klimovskikh, chief of staff of the front;

— A.T. Grigoriev, Chief of Communications of the Front;

— N.A. Klich, Chief of Artillery of the Front;

— A.A. Korobkov, commander of the 4th Army of the Western Front;

— Deputy Commander of the Front's Air Force, Tayursky.

The Commander of the Western Front Air Force, Hero of the Soviet Union, and veteran of the Spanish Civil War, Major General I.I. Kopen, shot himself (or was shot) on the first day of the war, June 22, 1941.

An attentive reader has surely already noticed the absence from this mournful list of executed generals of one particular surname,

And yet this is indeed very strange. Both in terms of military rank (Lieutenant General) and position held (Deputy Front Commander), I.V. Boldin outranked all those who were repressed, with the exception of Pavlov himself, of course. And if the entire front command was guilty of "criminal inaction and the collapse of troop command," how was the commander of the Western Front's main strike force able to go unpunished?

Boldin could in no way excuse himself on the grounds of inexperience. His service record already included two "liberation campaigns": in Poland (September 1939) and in Bessarabia (June 1940). Moreover, during the invasion of Poland in September 1939, Corps Commander Boldin commanded a cavalry-mechanized group of the Belarusian Front, which launched an offensive along the Slonim–Volkovysk line and, after fierce fighting on September 20–21, stormed the city of Grodno, meaning that Boldin was very familiar with the battle sites. Most likely, the explanation for Boldin's fortunate fate is very simple. The Chekists simply could not summon him in time for execution—from late June to early August, he was surrounded and inaccessible to them. Well, in August 1941, after the rout of most of the regular army and the capture of dozens of generals (a total of 63 generals were taken prisoner by the Germans in just six months of 1941), Stalin became more restrained in executing the commanders who remained in the ranks. Moreover, after breaking out of the encirclement, Boldin was commended in an order from the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, promoted in rank, and soon appointed commander of the 50th Army.

Boldin's memoirs, written after the war, are one of the few sources on the history of the defeat of the Western Front's strike force. Alas, the severe psychological stress that General Boldin had to endure did not pass without leaving its mark. The main theme of his memoirs is that the dull and heartless drill

sergeant Pavlov ruined everything: "...Stepping away from the command post, I thought: how far removed from reality Pavlov is! We had too few forces to counterattack the enemy... But what could we do? An order is an order! Many years later, after the war, I learned that Pavlov had been issuing one combat order after another to my nonexistent (whose fault was it that it was "nonexistent"? — M.S.) one combat order after another. Why did Pavlov need to issue these orders? To whom was he sending them? (It seems Boldin never realized that the task he had failed at so disgracefully had been assigned specifically to him. — M.S.). Perhaps they served only to create the appearance, in Moscow's eyes, that some measures were being taken on the Western Front to counter the advancing enemy..." (80).

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. In a very serious document—a memorandum submitted during the rehabilitation of Pavlov and his "accomplices" in July 1957—Boldin (by then already a colonel general) wrote the following verbatim: "...Pavlov is guilty of having asked Stalin to appoint him commander of the district's forces, knowing full well that from the start of the war he would be commander of the front's forces. Pavlov, having weak operational training, could not have been commander of the front's forces... Klimovskikh, the chief of staff of the front, is to blame for falling under Pavlov's influence and becoming Pavlov's errand boy..." (81, p. 194).

As for who actually possessed "solid operational training," Boldin modestly remained silent. Much becomes clearer when one recalls that, prior to his appointment as deputy commander of the Western Special Military District, Boldin had been commander of the Odessa Military District. You must agree that being the top commander in Odessa and becoming a deputy in Minsk are two very different things...

However, the highest-ranking commander in terms of both rank and position who led the counterattack of the Western Front's cavalry-mechanized group was not Boldin at all, but Marshal Kulik. A prominent Soviet military leader, Deputy People's Commissar of Defense, and Chief of the Red Army's Main Artillery Directorate… One of the people who personally saw Marshal Kulik left the following recollection of that encounter:

"...A door at the back of the office swung open, and Marshal Kulik—a man of imposing stature—stumbled in. His face was a reddish-brown and quite imposing in size... His speech consisted of phrases that were completely unrelated to one another and meaningless on their own. It was utter nonsense, the ramblings of a half-drunk man. The most frightening thing was that standing before the commanders was not only a marshal, but also the Deputy People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR..." (163).

On June 24, 1941, Marshal Kulik arrived at the headquarters of the Boldin Military District as the plenipotentiary representative of the Supreme Command (i.e., Comrade Stalin) on the Western Front. However, he did not command the counteroffensive for very long. "Marshal Kulik ordered everyone to remove their insignia, throw away their documents, and then change into peasant clothes—and he changed himself... He suggested that we surrender our weapons, and that I personally hand over my medals and documents. However, apart from his aide-de-camp, no one surrendered their documents or weapons..."

This is how, briefly and clearly, the report by the head of the 3rd Department (i.e., counterintelligence) of the 10th Army describes the leading role of the Deputy People's Commissar of Defense in the combat operations of the Western Front (176). Contrary to rumors that "under Stalin, there was order in the country," Grigory Ivanovich was merely reprimanded for all this. Even the marshal's stars, which he had thrown into the bushes, were returned to Kulik.

Moreover, General Kulik's military career was only just beginning. On September 2, 1941, Kulik was appointed commander of the Independent 54th Army, which was tasked with relieving the siege of Leningrad. The result was a complete failure, after which, on September 26, 1941, Stalin ordered "Marshal Kulik, commander of the 5th Army, to be recalled to the High Command." On November 8, 1941, Kulik was sent to reinforce the defenses of Kerch—the last remaining pocket of Crimea still in the hands of the Red Army. Upon arriving in the Kuban as a plenipotentiary representative of the Supreme Command (and, to be fair, making a two-hour visit to Kerch), Kulik turned his serious attention to food supply issues. For himself. The most perishable delicacies were sent to the "Red Marshal's" young, fourth wife by military transport plane; everything else (including 50 kg of lard, 200 bottles of cognac, 40 boxes of mandarins, 20 kg of black caviar) was loaded onto a special rail car and sent to Moscow (81, p. 238).

In February 1942, Kulik was brought to trial for the first time for this looting in a combat zone and received a lenient punishment: he was demoted from marshal to major general, removed from his post as deputy people's commissar, and expelled from the Central Committee. However, he was still allowed to remain in the Communist Party—the party of fighters for universal equality and brotherhood. In the spring of 1943, Kulik resurfaced. For unknown merits, he was promoted and even given command of the 4th Guards Army. He commanded it… But he was soon removed and sent far away to the position of deputy chief of the Main Directorate for the Formation of the Red Army. In April 1945, due to the collapse of combat training in reserve military units and "moral decay" (i.e., systematic drunkenness and debauchery), he was removed from this post as well and demoted once again to the rank of major general.

The second, final, and definitive sentence was carried out only on August 24, 1950. After the trial, as the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court established, Comrade Kulik had frequently, in drunken conversations, disparaged the very party that had elevated him—and kept him for so many years—at the pinnacle of power. Comrade Galin never forgave anyone for this—not even his own favorites.

Incredibly, even this is not the end of Kulik's astonishing biography! In April 1956, he was rehabilitated, and in 1957—not without the knowledge of his old comrade, the then-all-powerful Minister of Defense of the USSR, Zhukov—he was even "restored" to the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union! The quotation marks around the word "restored" are not there by accident. At the time of his second arrest, Kulik was a major general. So it would be more accurate to speak of a unique, one-of-a-kind case of a posthumous (!!!) promotion in rank—and by as many as four ranks, no less...

Strictly speaking, the mere presence of military leaders like Kulik and Boldin was enough to doom the troops to an unprecedented defeat. In search of other reasons, let's turn to a detailed analysis of the course of the fighting.

THE FIRST BATTLE

First and foremost, it should be noted that the joint operations of the Northwestern and Western Fronts never actually took place. The main strike forces of the Northwestern Front—Major General Shestopalov's 12th Mechanized Corps and Major General Kurkin's 3rd Mechanized Corps (minus the 5th Tank Division)—were redirected from the Kaunas – Suwałki (as prescribed by Directive No. 3) to the northwest, toward the city of Šiauliai, where a major tank battle took place on June 23–24 against the main forces of the Wehrmacht's 4th Panzer Group. As for the 5th Tank Division, on the morning of June 22, by order of the commander of the Northwestern Front, it was removed from the 3rd Mechanized Corps and placed under the direct command of the commander of the 11th Army.

Starting in mid-June 1941, the troops of the 11th Army, as well as all other units of the Baltic Special Military District (the future Northwestern Front), were brought to full combat readiness under the strictest secrecy. As early as June 15, 1941, the commander of the district's forces, Colonel General F.I. Kuznetsov, issued Order No. 0052, in which he reminded his subordinates that "today, more than ever, we must be in a state of full combat readiness... at any moment we must be ready to carry out any combat mission" (19, p. 8). The order went on to provide quite specific instructions: "...Begin erecting barbed-wire barriers immediately (emphasis added by me here and below—M.S.)...

From the very first hour of hostilities, organize the protection of our rear, and immediately detain all suspicious individuals and quickly establish their identities... Aircraft at airfields are to be dispersed and camouflaged in forests and thickets, ensuring they are not lined up in formation... Tank and artillery units' depots are to be dispersed, positioned in forests, and thoroughly camouflaged, while maintaining the ability to assemble on alert within the specified timeframes... The army commander, corps commander, and division commander are to draw up a schedule for carrying out this order, which must be fully implemented by June 25 of this year." (19, pp. 11–12).

On June 18, 1941, the commander of the Baltic Military District issued the following order: "...The chief of the air defense zone is to bring the entire air defense of the district to full combat readiness by the end of June 19, 1941 (emphasis added by me—M.S.)... No later than the morning of June 20, 1941, deploy communications teams with the necessary equipment to the front-line and army command posts to set up communications nodes there... Identify and train communications teams, which must be ready by the morning of June 20, 1941, to take control of the communications nodes approved by me upon the orders of unit commanders.... Establish mobile anti-tank mine units along the Telšiai, Šiauliai, Kaunas, and Kalvarija routes. For this purpose, maintain stockpiles of anti-tank mines transportable by motor vehicles. The detachments must be ready by June 21, 1941. ... The plan for the destruction of bridges is to be approved by the Military Councils of the armies. Deadline: June 21, 1941. Collect all fuel tankers from the district's units (except for aviation and mechanized units) and transfer 50% of them to each of the 3rd and 12th Mechanized Corps. Deadline: June 21, 1941." (19, pp. 22–25).

On the cover of "Collection of Combat Documents" No. 34 (from which these orders are quoted) there is a stamp reading: "Declassified." The number of the General Staff Directive on declassification and the date: November 30, 1965. The sixty-fifth year. For decades, the leading figures of Soviet military-historical "science" knew—or, at the very least, should have known—the contents of these documents, yet year after year they continued to spin tales about a "sudden attack" and a "peacefully slumbering Soviet country"...

Unfortunately, SBD No. 34 is the only collection of combat documents from military districts (fronts) that includes even a few documents from the period prior to June 22, 1941. All other collections (as, indeed, do all the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense [TsAMO] fonds accessible to independent researchers) begin immediately on June 22, the day of the "sudden attack". Everything that preceded this terrible "surprise" has been conveniently glossed over. But—there are no rules without exceptions. In SBD No. 33 (combat documents of mechanized corps), Order No. 0033 of the commander of the 12th Mechanized Corps, dated June 18 (28, pp. 23–24), somehow found its way into the collection (and not even at the very beginning, but in the eighth position, after the documents from July 1941). The document bears the classification "Of Special Importance," which is highly unusual for corps-level documents. Order No. 0033 begins with the following words: "Upon receipt of this order, bring all units to combat readiness. Bring units to combat readiness in accordance with combat alert mobilization plans, but do not declare the alert itself (emphasis mine—M.S.)... Take with you only

what is necessary for survival and combat." This is followed by an instruction to begin moving out at 23:00 on June 18 to the assembly areas, with all final destinations along the routes located in forests!

The author of this book was unable to locate the exact text of a similar order for the 3rd Mechanized Corps, but it is known that the 5th Tank Division was preparing for the imminent and inevitable outbreak of hostilities in the same way as all other units and formations of the Baltic Military District: On June 18, all units of the division were put on alert, moved from their permanent bases, and deployed along the eastern bank of the Neman River in the area of Alytus and to the south (8). Thus, the 5th Tank Division found itself precisely in the area (Alytus–Merkinė) at which the tip of the German "tank wedge" was aimed.

The 20th and 7th Tank Divisions, part of the Wehrmacht's 3rd Tank Group, were advancing directly on Alytus. By noon on June 22, the German 20th Tank Division, having covered a distance of 60 km from the border village of Kalvarija to Alytus, crossed the Neman River via a bridge that had never been blown up, despite the existence of a "plan for the destruction of bridges approved by the Army Military Council" (see above). The leading Soviet expert on the early period of the Great Patriotic War, Professor Anfilov, Doctor of Historical Sciences, and head of the history department at the elite MGIMO, offers the following explanation for this fact in one of his numerous monographs:

"The enemy's rapid crossing of the Neman River was made possible because the pontooners of the 4th Pontoon Bridge Regiment, due to the complexity of the situation and the failure to receive an order to demolish the bridges from their general commanders, did not blow up the bridges in the aforementioned areas" (177, p. 67).

Here, for the first (but by no means the last) time, we encounter the astonishing logic of Soviet historians: the ill-fated "complexity of the situation" is perceived (and imposed on readers) as a kind of natural disaster, as a valid, "objective" (i.e., one independent of human action or inaction) reason that simultaneously justifies EVERYTHING. At the same time, there is not even a discussion of what was the cause and what was the consequence; whether the complexity of the situation led to the loss of such a crucial defensive line as the full-flowing Neman River was supposed to be, or, on the contrary, whether the widespread failure of specific commanders to fulfill their direct duties allowed the Germans to cross the Neman unhindered. Which is what created the "complex situation"...

In the memoirs of Second Lieutenant A.T. Ilyin (who, on the eve of the war, was the head of the chemical service of the motor transport battalion of the 5th Tank Division), some very noteworthy details of this "complex situation" come to light:

"Our 5th Tank Division, having been placed on combat alert in advance, moved to the eastern bank of the Neman River and took up defensive positions several days before the war began. When we took up our defensive positions, I was appointed liaison officer between the division headquarters and the motor transport battalion... At about 11:30 a.m., a wet woman who had swum across the Neman was brought to headquarters; she said she had seen German tanks outside the city, but immediately the prosecutor shouted 'provocation' and 'spy' and shot her on the spot. And 30 minutes later, near the bridge, soldiers detained a man who was Lithuanian; in broken Russian, he told us that German tanks were already in the city, but the investigative officer shot him too, calling him a provocateur..." (178).

However, no river in and of itself constitutes a "defensive line." After all, in the absence of an armed enemy, a pontoon bridge can be erected across a river like the Neman within a few hours. The defense of a line is ensured (or not ensured) by people—the soldiers and commanders of the relevant military

units and formations. On June 22, 1941, in the area of Alytus, the 5th Tank Division could have (and, in accordance with the plans and orders of the 11th Army command, was supposed to) serve as such a formation. In a combat report sent at 9:35 a.m. on June 22 by the commander of the Northwestern Front to the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR, it was reported that "the 5th Tank Division on the eastern bank of the Neman River in the Alytus area will cover the withdrawal of the 128th Rifle Division (a division of the 11th Army located directly at the border. — M.S.) and cover the rear of the 11th Army against the Lithuanians, as well as prevent the enemy from crossing to the eastern bank of the Neman River north of Druskininkai" (19, p. 37).

It is noteworthy that the task of "covering the 11th Army's rear against the Lithuanians" (referring to two divisions of the Red Army's 29th Rifle Corps, formed in 1940 from the armed forces of "liberated Lithuania") is listed first, while the task of "preventing the enemy from crossing to the eastern bank of the Neman River" is phrased as supplementary ("as well as"). But, of course, it is not this detail that should catch our attention. The main point is that the 5th Tank Division had the real capability not only to halt the advance of the German 20th Tank Division, but also to rout it completely.

The 5th Tank Division (like the entire 3rd Mechanized Corps) was among the "first wave" of tank formations (the first eight mechanized corps were formed in the summer of 1940) and was almost fully equipped with combat materiel. It even had more artillery than its authorized strength (see table).

Despite the noticeable "surplus" of artillery, the available mechanized towing equipment (65 tractors and tow trucks) was quite sufficient for towing it (37-mm anti-aircraft guns and mortars were transported by trucks and did not require tracked tow trucks). As early as November 1940 (i.e., long before the start of the covert mobilization in the spring of 1941), the 5th Tank Division had 1,051 vehicles of all types on its roster, including 92 tanker trucks (compared to authorized levels of 1,360 and 139, respectively) (179). However, the number of motor vehicles and tractor units was of little significance in a situation where the 5th Tank Division fought its first and only battle directly in the area of its prewar deployment.

The main component of the 5th Tank Division's armament was, of course, tanks: 188 light tanks (170 BTs and 18 T-26s), 30 three-turret T-28s (an infantry support tank armed with a short-barreled 76-mm gun—an analogue of the German "Cigarette" tank—and two machine guns in separate rotating turrets), and 50 of the latest T-34s. It is not entirely clear whether the 5th Tank Division was equipped with KV heavy tanks.

Most sources make no mention of them, but, on the other hand, it is known that as early as the end of April 1941, the 3rd Mechanized Corps had a total of 78 KV tanks on its roster (180). Heavy tanks could only have been in service with two of the corps' tank divisions (the 2nd and 5th Tank Divisions). Even if we assume that the 2nd Tank Division was fully equipped with KV tanks up to its authorized strength (63 units), in that case the 5th Tank Division would still have had at least 15 heavy KV tanks "allotted" to it. If, however, we rely on the data from a highly authoritative source (8) stating that the 2nd Tank Division had 51 KV tanks in service, then, purely arithmetically, the 5th Tank Division should have had 37 KV tanks.

Is 37 KV tanks and 50 T-34s a large number for a single tank division? Everything is relative. To properly assess the armament and combat capabilities of the 5th Tank Division, one must compare them with those of the enemy, namely the Wehrmacht's 20th Tank Division.

The only German tank that, in the summer of 1941, could at least theoretically engage the Soviet T-34

(but not the KV) was the latest versions (H and 3) of the Rh-Sch medium tank, armed with a 50-mm K^K-38 gun. At close range, this gun could penetrate the T-34's side armor in the area where the track rollers were located (where the 45-mm armor plate was positioned vertically, without any slope). And although a German tank had to maneuver actively on the battlefield to fire at the enemy's flank, and although hitting the narrow gap between the road wheels of a moving tank was nearly impossible, and although the 76-mm gun mounted on the T-34 easily penetrated the Rh-Sch's frontal (and even more so its 30-mm side) armor at a range of one kilometer, the Rh-Sch crew might still have had some chance of success. These chances increased dramatically when using a special sub-caliber armor-piercing shell with a tungsten carbide core, but such shells were extremely rare; moreover, due to their design features, they usually ricocheted off the sloped armor plates of the T-34.

Across the entire Wehrmacht tank force on the Eastern Front, there were 707 Rh-Sch tanks equipped with a 50-mm gun. However, the 3rd Tank Group did not have a SINGLE tank of this type (in the neighboring 4th Tank Group, there were only 71 such tanks). The tank divisions of the 3rd Tank Group (including the 20th Tank Division) were armed primarily with Czech "Škoda" tanks of the 1938 model, designated Rh-38 by the Wehrmacht (1). This was a light tank with bulletproof armor, a low-powered (125 l/s) engine, and a hull assembled with bolts and rivets (the heads of which would tear off upon impact from an enemy shell, injuring the crew). O. Karius, a German tank crewman who was with the 20th Panzer Division at the start of the war, recalls:

"...On June 8, we were hit. For the first time, I had to climb out of a disabled vehicle... We cursed the brittle and inflexible Czech steel, which offered no resistance to the Russian 45-mm antitank gun. The fragments of our own armor plates and the mounting bolts caused more damage than the shrapnel and the shell itself. My knocked-out teeth soon ended up in the trash can at the first-aid station..." (183, p. 15).

The Rkh-38 (I) was armed with a Czech-made A-7 37-mm gun, which, although it had slightly greater armor-penetration capability than the German 37-mm "hammer," was practically useless in combat against the T-34. Overall, the Rh-38 (c), based on its full range of tactical and technical characteristics, was comparable to the Soviet "hopelessly outdated" T-26 light tank and was significantly inferior (in terms of armament, speed, and range) to the high-speed BT-7 tank. But even this "wonder weapon" was insufficient to equip the Wehrmacht's tank divisions, so the 3rd Tank Group even used light RKh-1 training and combat tankettes armed with machine guns as line tanks—vehicles that were fundamentally unsuitable for combat against any Soviet tanks.

On the morning of June 22, the Wehrmacht's 20th Panzer Division had 44 RKh-1s, 31 RKh-Ps (a slightly more powerful tankette armed with a 20-mm "cannon"), 121 Rh-38s (O), and 31 Rh-1U medium tanks (armed with a short-barreled 75-mm "cigarette butt"; the latest modifications had frontal armor reinforced to 50–60 mm) (10, p. 206). The ratio of tank armament between the 5th Soviet and 20th German tank divisions can be presented in the following table:

T-26 BT-7 T-28 T-34 KV

5th Tank Division (Soviet) 18 170 30 50 37

20th Tank Division (German) 44 31 121 31

Rg-1 Rg-P Rg-38 (1) Rg-1U

In a head-on tank battle, the Soviet T-34s and KVs were simply supposed to mow down this entire German tank “menagerie” while remaining almost completely safe. Moreover, the head-on battle near Alytus was not entirely “head-on”: the German tank division approached the city and the bridge across the Neman River in a marching column, while the Soviet tanks could theoretically have been deployed in battle formation and camouflaged in advance (from June 19 to 22) at prepared firing positions.

The German tank crews had not a shred of the “two years of experience in modern warfare” (which Soviet propaganda historians were so fond of touting): the Wehrmacht’s 20th Panzer Division was formed in October 1940; it had not participated in either the Polish or French campaigns, and the battle near Alytus was also its first engagement of the war. In the aforementioned memoirs of O. Karius, we read:

“...With the exception of a few officers and noncommissioned officers, none of us had yet seen combat. Until then, we had only heard real gunfire at the firing range. We put our faith in the veteran soldiers who had been awarded Iron Crosses and combat decorations, and they remained completely unflappable. Everyone else’s stomachs and bladders couldn’t take it...” (183, p. 11).

The tank battle near Alytus (which was most likely the very first tank battle of the Great Patriotic War) has not been overlooked by Soviet historians and memoirists. In particular, there is an article written by M.V. Ezhov, Ph.D. in History, specifically devoted to this tragic episode of the war (178). Unfortunately, the apparent abundance of information does nothing to help establish the true picture of events. Quite the contrary—the facts presented (if they are indeed “facts” and not “plausible reasons” for the defeat of a powerful tank formation invented after the fact) contradict both one another and basic common sense. In particular, based on the available sources, it is impossible to answer even the simplest questions: where, when, and which units of the 5th Tank Division took part in the battle?

P.A. Rotmistrov, Chief Marshal of the Armored Forces of the USSR, entered the war with the rank of colonel and as chief of staff of the 3rd Mechanized Corps (and prior to that, he had served for several months as acting deputy commander of the 5th Tank Division). According to his memoirs, only a few units of the 5th Tank Division engaged German tanks on the evening of June 22, and they were already on the eastern bank of the Neman River:

“...By the evening of June 22, enemy divisions of the first echelon of the 3rd Panzer Group, using bridges captured in the Alytus and Merki area, had crossed the Neman River. In an attempt to halt the enemy’s advance on the Neman, the command of the 11th Army committed the 5th Tank Division to battle. The division commander, Colonel F.F. Fedorov, managed to move only the artillery of the 5th Motorized Rifle Regiment to the bridge near Alytus (which consisted of just four 76-mm guns. — M.S.), a separate anti-aircraft artillery battery, and the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Tank Regiment...” (181).

However, according to the description of the battle provided in M.V. Ezhov’s article, the 5th Tank Division engaged the Germans with significantly greater forces, and on the western bank of the river, at midday on June 22, even before the enemy had crossed the Neman:

“...By midday, the enemy had managed to break through to Alita-su. Then, on orders from the 11th Army command, the 5th Tank Division advanced to the western bank of the Neman to defend the bridgehead positions (emphasis added here and below by me—M.S.) and immediately engaged in combat with units of the 20th Tank Division. The 10th Tank Regiment of the 5th Division, three kilometers west of Alitus, was the first to encounter and destroy an advance detachment of Nazi motorcyclists. Then, tank crews from the 9th Tank Regiment, artillerymen from the 5th Motorized Rifle

Regiment, and a separate anti-aircraft artillery battalion of the 5th Tank Division, allowing the enemy tanks to approach to within 200–300 meters, opened direct-fire on them. In 30–40 minutes of combat, they destroyed 16 enemy vehicles. The enemy tank division's advance was halted.

The enemy then launched bombing raids and artillery fire against the positions held by Soviet tank crews on the western bank of the Neman River. They suffered heavy losses. Enemy tanks managed to break through the bridge to the eastern bank of the Neman River south of Alytus. But they were immediately counterattacked by units of the 5th Tank Division, which crushed the German tanks and stormed into the city..."

According to other sources, the battle also began on the afternoon of June 22 on the western bank of the Neman, with one motorized rifle battalion of the 5th Tank Division participating alongside tank units:

"The commander of the 5th Tank Division sent one motorized rifle battalion, reinforced by artillery from the 5th Motorized Rifle Regiment, to the bridgehead fortifications near Alytus. Later, as they became ready, other units of the division arrived there at various times, including the 2nd Tank Battalion of the 9th Tank Regiment and a separate anti-aircraft artillery division. By noon on June 22, these units had already been drawn into tank combat with the enemy's 7th and 20th Tank Divisions, which had broken through to Alytus...» (8).

There are reports that, along with the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Tank Regiment, the regiment's 1st Battalion (T-28 tanks), which was lying in ambush near the bridge on the eastern bank of the Neman, also took part in the battle.

On the other hand, according to O. Karius's memoirs, the tankers of the German 20th Tank Division reached the Neman without encountering the slightest resistance:

"...We awaited our first combat contact with the Russians with trepidation. But nothing of the sort happened. Since our battalion was not in the vanguard, such contact could only be expected if the vanguard were to be stopped. We reached the first objective of our advance that day—the airfield in Alytus—without incident. Overjoyed, we shed our dust-covered uniforms and were delighted when we finally found water to wash up properly.

"It's not half bad fighting here," said our tank commander, Non-commissioned Officer Deler, with a chuckle, after once again pulling his head out of the bucket of water... (183, p. 12).

The most surprising thing, however, is that not a single source (including documents or memoirs of enemy soldiers and commanders) even mentions any participation in the battle near Alytus by the main striking force of the 5th Tank Division—the T-34 and KV tanks! The Germans simply could not have failed to notice an encounter with the "thirty-four." In O. Karius's memoirs, mentioned repeatedly above, an entire chapter is devoted to the "first encounter" with the T-34, and this encounter left the German tank crews with the most vivid memories:

"...Another event hit us like a ton of bricks: Russian T-34 tanks appeared for the first time. We were completely astonished. How could it be that the higher-ups didn't know about the existence of this superb tank? The T-34, with its good armor, perfect design, and magnificent 76.2-mm long-barreled gun, struck fear into everyone, and all German tanks feared it right up until the end of the war. What were we to do against these monsters, thrown at us in such great numbers?"

But this event, which astonished the soldiers of the Wehrmacht's 20th Panzer Division, did not take place near Alytus, but in early August in the Yelnya area! Where, then, were the 50 T-34 tanks and several dozen KV tanks from the 5th Tank Division on June 22? Had they camouflaged themselves too thoroughly?

The final rout of the 5th Tank Division most likely took place on the eastern bank of the Neman River, after units of the Wehrmacht's 7th Tank Division—which had crossed the Neman slightly south of Alytus (also via an undamaged bridge)—arrived on the battlefield. In Rotmistrov's memoirs, this event is described as follows:

"...After capturing the second bridge across the Neman River, south of Alytus, the enemy launched a rapid offensive to the north and soon surrounded the main forces of the 5th Tank Division on the eastern bank of the Neman from two sides. In an unequal and extremely fierce battle, our formation suffered a defeat, losing 90 combat vehicles, although our soldiers destroyed up to 170 enemy tanks, armored cars, and armored personnel carriers."

Enemy documents confirm the very fact of a tank battle near Alytus. However, the casualty figures are completely different. For example, in a telegram sent on the morning of June 23, 1941, by the headquarters of the 3rd Tank Group to the command of Army Group "Center," we read:

"...6. On the evening of June 22, the 7th Tank Division fought the largest tank battle of this war (a strange expression for an operational report compiled on the second day of 'this war.' — M.S.) east of Alytus against the 5th Tank Division. Seventy enemy tanks were destroyed. We lost 11 tanks, including 4 heavy tanks (in the Wehrmacht, the Rh-GU was classified as a "heavy tank." — M.S.)" (182, p. 34).

There is nothing surprising about the fact that the actual losses of German tanks turned out to be an order of magnitude less than those reported by Rotmistrov—such an overstatement of enemy losses is not an exception but the norm for any operational reports. What is surprising, however, is this: the Germans claim to have destroyed 70 Soviet tanks in battle (the actual figure was apparently even lower), while the Soviet marshal writes of the loss of 90 combat vehicles! Strictly speaking, the term "combat vehicle" is not synonymous with "tank," but in this context, Rotmistrov was, of course, referring specifically to tanks. Most likely, the memoirist needed the higher figure to support his assertion that "the soldiers and commanders of the 5th Tank Division, despite the gravity of the situation, remained courageous and fought until the last shell, until the last tank." However, even after losing 90 tanks, the ^th Tank Division should still have had more than 200 tanks remaining! It would seem too early to speak of the "last tank" (by no means did every Wehrmacht tank division have 200 tanks in its ranks at the start of hostilities); nevertheless, after the battle near Alytus, the 5th Tank Division practically ceased to exist as a combat unit.

The 5th Tank Division's first (and last) battle ended either on the evening of June 22 or the morning of June 23. The document from the 3rd Tank Group headquarters cited above refers to the evening of June 22. The same time is also indicated in Anfilov's monograph ("Soviet tank crews fought a fierce, intense battle with enemy tanks for several hours at the crossings over the Neman River, but as darkness fell on June 22, they were forced to retreat"). However, the memoirs of G. Gota, former commander of the 3rd Tank Group, quite clearly refer to the morning of June 23:

"A tank regiment of the 7th Tank Division, which had been guarding the bridges at Alytus and had been relieved by an infantry unit during the night, encountered the Russian 5th Tank Division advancing from Varėna as it moved out of Alytus early in the morning. In an 'exceptionally fierce tank battle,' as

the regiment commander reported, the enemy division—which was inferior in its ability to conduct individual combat—suffered defeat" (13, p. 68).

Contemporary historians also note that the 5th Tank Division's final battle took place on the morning of June 23 (8, 178). There are also reports that on the night of June 22–23, the 10th Tank Regiment, part of the 5th Tank Division, was engaged in an activity so unusual for a tank unit as searching for a nonexistent German "parachute assault force numbering 660 men" in the area of Varėna (30 km southeast of Alytus).

Such close attention to determining the exact time of the 5th Tank Division's defeat stems from the fact that, as early as dawn on June 24, the division commander, Colonel F.F. Fedorov, along with the remnants of his division (5 tanks, 20 armored vehicles, and 9 guns), found himself in the area of the Belarusian city of Molodechno—that is, 170 (one hundred seventy) km as the crow flies from Alytus! Army General S.P. Ivanov (who, at the start of the war, was the chief of the operations department of the 13th Army's headquarters on the Western Front) describes his meeting with the commander of the 5th Tank Division in his memoirs as follows:

"...A colonel in a tank crewman's uniform entered and reported that he was the commander of the 5th Tank Division... Colonel Fedorov's tank division had been tasked with covering the retreat of the remnants of the infantry units and preventing the Nazis from crossing the Neman River north of Druskininkai. However, the enemy, launching powerful air and artillery strikes, prevented the division from reaching the Neman, and it, too, suffered heavy losses. With our retreating infantry in their wake, enemy tanks broke through across two bridges to the eastern bank of the Neman...

"This is an irreparable disaster," lamented the tank crewman, "and I will have to pay for it with my head" (45, p. 49).

However, documents (Operational Summary No. 4 of the Western Front Headquarters, 10:00 a.m., June 24, 1941) indicate that Colonel Fedorov not only "lamented" but also engaged in what is known in the language of a military tribunal as "spreading panic-inducing rumors": "...4. A commander from the 5th Tank Division of the Northwestern Front reported to the commander of the 13th Army that Vilnius had been occupied by the Germans at 17:00 on June 23, 1941, and that they were continuing their offensive" (186, p. 37). In this instance, the commander of the 5th Tank Division was greatly "jumping the gun"—the German 7th Pike Division did not enter Vilnius until the morning of June 24.

Another group from the 10th Tank Regiment of the 5th Tank Division (consisting of about 15 T-34 tanks and 14 light T-26 tanks) had retreated by the end of June to the area of the village of Voronovo (20 km north of Vilnius). (comprising about 15 T-34 tanks and 14 light T-26 tanks) had retreated by the end of June to the area of the village of Voronovo (20 km north of Lida, 80 km from Alytus), to the positions of the 37th Tank Division of the 21st Rifle Corps of the Western Front (8). Subsequently, this group was reorganized into a tank battalion, which participated in the 21st Rifle Corps' counterattack in the Lida area on June 26–27. G. Gota's memoirs mention that on June 25–28, the German 19th Tank Division in the Voronovo–Traby area "was constantly subjected to enemy attacks supported by 50-metric-ton tanks… until June 28, it repelled attacks from the south." These may have been tanks from the 5th Tank Division, whose unknown crews continued fighting even after the division had been routed...

By that time, the command of the Northwestern Front had lost all sense of where the remnants of the 5th Tank Division were located. A combat report from the front headquarters, sent to the People's

Commissar of Defense of the USSR at 22:45 on June 24, stated: “At 14:00 on June 23, 1941, the 5th Tank Division was engaged in combat with the enemy in the Rodzishki area (30 km southwest of Vilnius. — M.S.). The division’s status and location as of June 24, 1941, are unknown” (19, p. 66). However, is it worth making a fuss over a single division when, two days later, the headquarters of the Northwestern Front had already “lost” the entire 11th Army!

In the next combat report, sent to Moscow at 8:35 p.m. on June 26, we read:

“...The 11th Army—its headquarters and Military Council—according to various reports, has been captured or destroyed. The Germans have captured a coded document. The status and location of the 5th, 33rd, 188th, and 128th Rifle Divisions are unknown. Many have fallen behind or fled and are being detained [on] the route to Dvinsk. A great deal of weaponry has been abandoned...” (19, p. 69).

Reconnaissance aircraft were searching for the remnants of the 11th Army and its headquarters (which was by no means destroyed or captured). Not German aircraft—ours. On June 30, the search yielded some success. On that day, a telegram signed by G.K. Zhukov was sent from Moscow to the headquarters of the Northwestern Front (which had “relocated” to Pskov—that is, 450 km from the border—on that very day): “In the area of Dovgilishki Station, Koltynyany, and the forests west of Sventcany (Švenčionys), the 11th Army of the Northwestern Front has been found, retreating from the Kaunas area. The army has no fuel, ammunition, or food and fodder. The army is unaware of the situation and does not know what to do...”

In classical Soviet historiography, such confusion was typically explained by the notorious “loss of communication”—German saboteurs allegedly cut all the wires, and supposedly no one in the Red Army had ever even heard of radio communication. There was indeed no communication within the units and formations of the Northwestern Front (as, indeed, on all the other fronts). But the technical means for radio communication did exist—and in considerable numbers. And not only at the front and army levels. For example, as early as July 1940—that is, almost a year before the war began—the 5th Tank Division was equipped with the following (not counting the 120 tank radio stations of the 71st Tank Corps):

— 1 radio station of the 11th Army Corps,

— 23 radio stations of the 5th Army,

— 87 battalion- and company-level radio stations (6PK, RRS, RRU, RB-22) (179).

Now it is worth explaining what all these capital letters stand for. The 11AK is a powerful (500 W) radio station transported on two trucks. It provided telephone and telegraph communication within a radius of 300–500 km. The 5AK was the size of a large trunk and was transported in the bed of a truck or on a horse-drawn cart. This radio had a range of 25 km for telephone communication and 50 km for telegraph communication, meaning it fully (and even with significant overlap) provided radio communication along the entire front line of the division’s advance...

The last mention of the fate of the 5th Tank Division in the combat reports of the Northwestern Front command is dated July 2, 1941:

“...On June 24, 1941, the 5th Tank Division was surrounded by the enemy in the Vilnius area and scattered. The remaining soldiers and commanders began to appear only on June 26, 1941, in the

Polotsk area (200 km east of Vilnius, 185 km northeast of Molodechno) and on June 30, 1941, in the Pskov area. The combat vehicles were either completely destroyed or abandoned on enemy territory. The remnants of the personnel and equipment of the wheeled vehicles are now gathering in the Pskov and Polotsk areas...” (19, p. 107).

However, Colonel Fedorov’s grim premonitions (“I will have to pay for this with my head”) did not come true. The commander of the division—which had been “scattered” over an area of hundreds of kilometers—was neither shot in front of the ranks of the surviving soldiers nor sent as a private to the front lines to “atone for his guilt with blood.” He was appointed head of the Moscow Armored Vehicle Training Center, and later—head of the Solikamsk Air-Sled School in the Northern Urals. There, deep in the rear, thousands of kilometers from the front, he met an absurd death from typhus on January 20, 1945.

“AND HE WENT, CARRIED AWAY BY HIS COMMAND...”

In reality, the German breakthrough to the eastern bank of the Neman River marked the beginning of the end for the Red Army’s Western Front. Advancing rapidly along a vast arc from Alytus to Vilnius to Molodechno, the divisions of the Wehrmacht’s 3rd Panzer Group reached Minsk, where on June 27–28 they clashed with the 47th Panzer Corps—part of the 2nd Panzer Group—which was advancing along the Brest–Baranovichi–Minsk highway. Three-quarters of the Western Front’s units found themselves trapped in a massive encirclement. But on June 23–24, the situation could have been assessed quite differently: the German tank divisions had withdrawn from the area of the planned counteroffensive by Boldin’s cavalry-mechanized group, and the crushing blow of the Soviet tank “pickaxe” was supposed to come down on the German infantry.

The 11th Mechanized Corps of the Western Front was the closest to the area of the planned offensive (see Map No. 2). It was the first to engage in battle. The fragmentary information about the 11th Mechanized Corps’ very brief combat campaign is just as contradictory and difficult to make sense of as the details cited above regarding the circumstances of the 5th Tank Division’s rout. The only thing that can be stated with certainty is that any mention of the 11th Mechanized Corps in traditional Soviet historiography is accompanied by a torrent of lamentations (“23% of its tanks were obsolete models... its motor vehicle and tractor-trailer strength was 15–20% of the authorized strength... its strength of tank officers was 45–55% of the authorized strength...”). And so on.

All of this is the absolute truth. Period. Let’s now turn to the specific details. First of all, let’s replace all these “percentages” with absolute numbers. The main armament of the mechanized corps is tanks. How many were there?

A wide variety of figures appear in historical literature: 237 units (VIZh No. 4/1989), 360 units (the “Mechanized Corps of the Red Army” website, citing the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense [TsAMO], f. 38, op. 11373, d. 67), 414 units (“1941—Lessons and Conclusions”). The author proposes using the figure of 331 as a basis—this is precisely the number of tanks specified in a document compiled by direct participants in the events. This refers to the document published in VIZh No. 9/1989, “Political Report of the Political Department of the 11th Mechanized Corps to the Military Council IV of the Western Front, dated July 15, 1941.” The tanks in the 11th Mechanized Corps were indeed the most obsolete: 242 G-26 tanks, 18 OT-26 flamethrower tanks, and 44 older-model BT tanks (BT-5). There were very few new tanks: 24 (according to other sources, 28) T-34 medium tanks and 3 KV heavy tanks.

Furthermore, “up to 10–15% of the tanks were not taken on the campaign because they were undergoing repairs.” -

Total: approximately 280 combat-ready tanks, almost none of which were light or modern.

Question: Can a tank formation armed with such “junk” actually fight?

Everything is relative. For decades, Soviet “historians” for some reason ignored this simplest, most obvious rule. Of course, the 11th Mechanized Corps was weak and “underdeveloped”—compared, for example, to the 6th Mechanized Corps of the Western Front or the 3rd Mechanized Corps of the Northwestern Front, which were armed with hundreds of the latest T-34s and KV tanks. But they were supposed to fight the Germans, not their neighbors on the front! The combat power of the 11th Mechanized Corps must be compared with that of German tank formations—their equipment, their armament, and their capabilities.

The troops of the five western military districts comprised 20 mechanized corps. If we exclude from this list the 17th and 20th Mechanized Corps, which had only 63 and 94 tanks, respectively (in the Red Army, 94 tanks were referred to as “only 94”), that leaves 18 mechanized corps. And the Wehrmacht’s invasion forces included 17 tank divisions. It is with these that we can and should compare our mechanized corps, in particular the 11th Mechanized Corps.

German tank divisions and corps did not have a strictly defined composition. Therefore, let’s take for comparison the largest Wehrmacht tank division that existed on the entire Eastern Front. This was the 7th Panzer Division under the command of Major General von Funk. Such a comparison is all the more appropriate given that the 7th Panzer Division was part of the very same Wehrmacht 3rd Panzer Group, against whose flank and rear General Boldin’s Mechanized Corps was supposed to strike.

The main armament of a tank division is tanks. The Wehrmacht’s 7th Tank Division had 265 of them. And our “understaffed” 11th Mechanized Corps had 331 tanks. For some reason, it is customary (among Soviet propagandists, at least) to assume that the Germans never had any breakdowns and that the number of combat-ready tanks always equaled their total number. Even if we take this absurd assumption at face value, the 11th Mechanized Corps still outnumbered the Wehrmacht’s largest tank division in terms of combat-ready tanks (280 versus 265).

Now let’s move from quantity to quality. At the start of the war, the 7th Tank Division was equipped with (10, p. 206):

— 53 RKh-P tankettes;

— 167 Rkh-38(1) light tanks;

— 30 Rkh-1U medium tanks;

— 15 “commander’s” tanks armed with machine guns, 7 of which were based on the Rkh-38(1).

At first glance, the 11th Mechanized Corps and the Wehrmacht’s 7th Tank Division possessed roughly equal combat capabilities (and this is without taking into account the undeniable qualitative superiority of the Soviet T-34 and KV tanks over the German Rh-1U). But this is a hasty and fundamentally flawed conclusion.

The 11th Mechanized Corps was significantly stronger.

“A tank is a carriage for a gun.” This aphorism, attributed to the outstanding Soviet artillery designer Grabin, certainly contains a degree of exaggeration. But only a very small one. All of a tank’s parameters, no matter how important they may be in and of themselves, are secondary to the most important factor—its armament. A tank is not designed for travel or for cover, but for destruction. The destruction of firepower and manpower, command posts and communications nodes in the enemy’s rear, and the rout of transport convoys and supply depots deep within the enemy’s defensive lines.

Thus, to carry out these primary tasks of the 11th Mechanized Corps’ tank forces, it was far better armed than the Wehrmacht’s 7th Tank Division. A 2.13-kg high-explosive fragmentation shell was developed for our 20K 45-mm tank gun. This shell produced 100 lethal fragments capable of striking exposed enemy personnel within a 15.6-meter radius. Yes, of course, this was a very light shell (three times lighter than that of a standard “three-inch” gun), but it was still capable of destroying many targets on the battlefield (machine-gun nests, mortar batteries). The 11th Mechanized Corps was armed with 345 20K guns (286 mounted on T-26 and BT tanks, 59 on BA-10 armored gun carriers).

In contrast, the German 7th Tank Division was armed with only 167 Škoda A-7 tank guns. Exactly half as many as in the 11th Mechanized Corps. Moreover, the weight of the German 37-mm high-explosive fragmentation shell (690 g) was one-third that of the corresponding Soviet 20K shell, which resulted in significantly less destructive effect against enemy infantry and cover.

As for the German Rh II light tankettes, the 20-mm cannon mounted on them was, in principle, unsuitable for engaging infantry and artillery. A projectile weighing 120–145 g, carrying (in various versions) between 4 and 15 g of explosive, was very weak. Before the war, guns of this caliber were mounted only on fighter aircraft in the USSR, but certainly not on armored vehicles. Moreover, tests and combat use of 20-mm aircraft cannons showed that “neutralizing enemy personnel in open terrain” was possible only with a direct hit on a person, while the fragmentation effect of the 20-mm “projectile” was utterly negligible.

Of course, the serious “work” of suppressing the enemy with fire was to be entrusted not to light tanks, but to mechanized howitzer artillery. This is precisely where the difference between a Soviet mechanized corps (even if understaffed) and a German division becomes most apparent.

At the start of the war, the artillery regiments of the three divisions of the 11th Mechanized Corps were equipped with (78):

— 16 152-mm howitzers;

— 36 122-mm howitzers.

Yes, this was significantly less than the standard complement (36 152-mm howitzers and 40 122-mm howitzers), but a German tank division, fully manned “down to the last button” according to the fall 1940 strength, could have had only:

— 12 150-mm howitzers;

— 24 105-mm howitzers;

— 4 150-mm guns.

The overall conclusion is obvious: even the understaffed 11th Mechanized Corps surpassed the Wehrmacht's largest tank division in terms of firepower.

Finally, any Soviet mechanized corps had more personnel than any German tank division. This is not surprising: a corps consists of three divisions and numerous separate corps units. More specifically, as of June 1, 1941, the understaffed 11th Mechanized Corps had 21,605 personnel on active duty, while the maximum authorized strength of a German tank division was one and a half times smaller. Moreover, there were 21,605 personnel in the 11th Mechanized Corps as of June 1, 1941. By June 22, the number of personnel had most likely increased, as a covert mobilization of reservists was in full swing across the country (a total of 768,000 men had been called up for "large-scale training exercises" before the war began), and mechanized units were being reinforced with personnel as a top priority.

The only area in which the 11th Mechanized Corps was inferior to the enemy's 7th Tank Division was in the number of vehicles—that is, in the ability of the motorized infantry, artillery, and logistics units to keep pace with the advancing "tank wedge." As of June 1, 1941, the corps had 920 automobiles, 148 motorcycles, and 55 tractors and tow trucks. This was significantly (5–6 times) less than the authorized strength. And if the 11th Mechanized Corps had indeed launched an offensive from Grodno toward Merkine (60–70 km), as ordered by Pavlov, the motorized infantry—which was not fully supported by transport—would inevitably have fallen behind the tanks. Theoretically. In reality, however, there was not even a hint of a breakthrough into the operational depth of the enemy's defenses; there was no need to chase after the Germans—they approached Grodno on their own, and the 11th Mechanized Corps fought its first and last battle practically in the area of its prewar deployment. In such a situation, the shortage of vehicles could not have played a decisive role. Moreover, from the aforementioned "political report," we learn that on the morning of June 22, the corps command made an absolutely correct decision:

"...Upon receiving the combat alert, all units mustered all personnel who were armed and capable of fighting, which amounted to 50–60% of the total strength, while the remaining personnel were left in the units' deployment area... Due to a lack of motorized transport for the 204th Motorized Division, the first echelon was transported by vehicle from the Volkovysk area (82 km by highway to Grodno. — M.S.) was transported by motor vehicles, while the subsequent echelons moved by combined march (i.e., the infantry units of the 204th Motorized Division marched on foot until they were picked up by motor vehicles that had returned after transporting the division's first echelon. — M.S.). Seven hours later (the 29th Tank Division after 3 hours and the 33rd Tank Division after 4 hours) following the declaration of combat alert, the corps units occupied the assembly area..."

It must be acknowledged that the Soviet historians were absolutely correct. There was no "mechanized corps" in the Grodno area. By 10:00 a.m. on June 22, 1941, a light tank division—which, by all quantitative measures, significantly outnumbered even the largest Wehrmacht tank division—had in fact concentrated south of Grodno under the designation "11th Mechanized Corps."

The Wehrmacht's largest tank division, the 7th Tank Division, caused a great deal of trouble. The memoirs of G. Goth, commander of the 3rd Tank Group (13)—written in great detail, in true "German" fashion—allow us to trace in detail the combat path of the 7th Tank Division during the first days and weeks of the war.

By noon on June 22, the bridges across the Neman River near Alytus had been captured; at noon on June 23, “a tank regiment of the 7th Tank Division reached the Lida–Vilnius road (75 km east of Alytus), while the division’s wheeled vehicles remained far behind” (but notably, the German general does not draw the conclusion from this that the division had lost all combat effectiveness); early in the morning of June 24, “the 7th Tank Division, after a brief battle, captured the city of Vilnius, while the division’s tank regiment continued to advance toward Mikhalishki” (Mikhališki is already in Belarus, and 180 km east of the border). Furthermore, “on June 26, the 7th Tank Division reached the Minsk–Moscow highway in the Smolevichi area” (this is already 30 km east of Minsk). Thus, in five days, the division covered 350 km along the forest roads of Lithuania and Belarus.

Then, after failing in its attempt to cross the Berezina River near the city of Borisov, the 7th Tank Division headed northeast, through Lepel toward Vitebsk. On July 5, in the Beshenkovichi area (175 km from Minsk), the 7th Tank Division “stumbled upon” the fully manned 7th Mechanized Corps, which had arrived from the Moscow Military District (this was the very same mechanized corps in which Stalin’s son had fought and been taken prisoner). After routing the Soviet mechanized corps and pushing it south, the 7th and 20th Tank Divisions crossed the Western Dvina between Beshenkovichi and Ulla; by July 10, they had completely captured Vitebsk, after which their paths diverged again: The 20th Tank Division headed northeast toward Velizh, while the 7th Tank Division, passing through Demidov, reached Highway No. 1 for the second time, this time in the Yartsev area (50 km east of Smolensk), thus covering two-thirds of the distance from the border to Moscow.

Three months later, on October 6, 1941, it was the 7th Tank Division that, in the Vyazma area, reached Highway No. 1 for the third time, thereby closing the encirclement of the Vyazma “cauldron”—the largest of the entire war. Then, during the bloody Battle of Moscow, the 7th Tank Division advanced another 245 km eastward, reaching Yakhroma (45 km north of Moscow). It was only there, near the Volga–Moscow Canal, that it was (according to the famous Sovinformburo report dated December 13, 1941) defeated by the troops of the 1st Shock Army. However, according to German sources, the 7th Tank Division continued to fight on the Eastern and Western Fronts until 1943.

The practical conclusion from all of the above is that a light tank division, it turns out, can fight, can advance, can engage in successful combat against both the enemy’s infantry and anti-tank units, can force its way across full-flowing rivers, and can storm large cities. Pardon the repetition, but the author would like to remind you once again that the Wehrmacht’s 7th Tank Division covered this entire distance using light Czech tanks and captured French trucks, which, on our dirt roads, went from being a means of transport for motorized infantry to something that had to be pushed. In just the first three weeks of the war, the 7th Tank Division covered 700 km (as the crow flies) from the border to Yartsevo—a distance slightly greater than that from Grodno to Berlin.

Strangely enough, communist historians have always regarded both of the following as inevitable, natural, and the only possible outcomes: that the 7th German Tank Division was already at Yartsevo by July 15, and that the 11th Mechanized Corps, which outclassed it in every respect, not only failed to reach Berlin (or at least Merkine), but also ceased to exist after three days of fighting near Grodno. Yet at first glance, it seems surprising and implausible that a German division, armed only with light tanks featuring anti-bullet armor, was able to “break through the lines” of dozens of Soviet infantry divisions, armed with hundreds of 45-mm anti-tank guns, which were guaranteed to penetrate the RG-38(1) armor—from the front, the side, “the rear, and the top.” It would seem that, given such a “shield-to-sword” ratio, a deep raid by German tanks should have ended in their complete annihilation.

However, things are not quite that simple. A tank is merely a tool, and the outcome of its use depends

first and foremost on the tactics employed—or, more precisely, on how well those tactics align with the technical characteristics of the weaponry. The ratio between the armor thickness of a light tank and the armor-penetrating power of an artillery shell—which seems "hopeless" at first glance—is only so in a situation where a lone tank stands on a field as flat as a table, waiting to be hit by a shell. In actual combat, however, things are somewhat different.

First, the tank is moving. Even a T-26 creeping slowly across a field softened by rain will cover the final 600 meters (hitting a moving tank from a greater distance is practically impossible) to the anti-tank gun's firing positions in 3 minutes. Theoretically, an anti-tank gun crew can fire 10–15 rounds per minute. But that's if they're not aiming, but simply "firing blindly." In reality, and taking into account that the recoil after a shot throws the sight off, the gunners have no more than 5–10 shots at their disposal. But a tank isn't just creeping across the field—it's creeping and firing. The odds for the two sides in a "duel" between a tank and an anti-tank gun are by no means equal. An armor-piercing shell that whizzes past just one centimeter from the tank's turret will cause it no harm, whereas a high-explosive fragmentation shell (even if it's a shell from a small-caliber 45-mm Soviet 20K tank gun) if it explodes just a few meters from the firing position, will inevitably silence the gun. Therefore, the 5–10 shots we mentioned above are, in real combat, an unattainable dream for an anti-tank gun crew—after the very first shots, the tank crew (a well-trained and well-prepared crew) will spot the firing gun and wipe it off the face of the earth with a couple of high-explosive fragmentation shells.

From these simple considerations, it follows that the simplest and most effective way to break through anti-tank defenses is the age-old principle of concentration, which is fundamental to all military affairs. A tank division, deployed in battle formation along a 2–3 km front, confidently breaks through the defenses of an infantry regiment that was armed with only 12 anti-tank guns at the start of the war. Even if the defenders manage to quickly redeploy their reserves to the breach area (36 37-mm anti-tank guns from the anti-tank battalion of a Wehrmacht infantry division), they will be unable to stop the attack by two or three companies of tanks. The loss of a certain number of tanks would be inevitable in this scenario, but a breach in the defenses would also be inevitable. This "certain number" could be minimized (if not reduced to zero) through artillery support for the tank attack.

It is precisely concentrated artillery fire—as paradoxical as that may sound—that serves as "additional armor," allowing light tanks with anti-bullet armor to survive on the battlefield. The word "massive" was not included in the previous sentence merely for the sake of literary flair. A howitzer fires indiscriminate overhead barrages, and it takes many, many rounds before one of the shells explodes near the firing position of an enemy anti-tank gun. As mentioned above, according to pre-war Red Army artillery standards, it took between 70 and 90 shells from a 122-mm howitzer to destroy a single anti-tank gun. However, a tank regiment does not have any howitzers; they are part of the artillery regiment of a tank (motorized) division. In other words, coordination is essential. A very simple word with a very clear meaning, on which almost everything in battle depends.

The Red Army Field Regulations PU-39 categorically stipulated: "An attack by frontline tanks must in all cases be supported by artillery and is not permitted without it." But coordination with artillery alone is not enough. Reconnaissance is needed, reliable communications are needed, artillery fire correction is needed, support from one's own infantry is needed, and many other elements that transform guns, tanks, and machine guns into a single military mechanism. The most important "component"

of this "mechanism" has been, is, and will always be the commander. A trained, experienced, and courageous commander. With such a commander and well-coordinated cooperation with the infantry and artillery, a tank formation armed with nothing more than light tanks with bulletproof armor broke

through the infantry defenses of the summer of 1941 with ironclad inevitability.

Dear reader, the above should not be taken as a continuation of the fable about the fox and the grapes. Of course, it is even better to launch an offensive with impenetrable tanks. And it is by no means a coincidence that, while preparing for the Great War, Stalin's "invariably peace-loving" empire began rearming its army with new tanks featuring anti-shell armor. But to claim that the absence (or scarcity) of such tanks was the sole objective reason for the lightning-fast defeat of a large mechanized formation (which, as of the morning of June 22, 1941, was the 11th Mechanized Corps) is, to say the least, absurd. It is not tanks that fight. It is tank crews and their commanders who fight. It is in their actions (or inaction)—and not in the millimeters of armor or kilometers of service life between overhauls—that we must seek the reason for what happened to the Red Army in the summer of '41. Of course, this is much more complicated—if only because there are extremely few documentary or memoir sources, many of which remain classified to this day, and the available documents are often contradictory and unreliable. But even all this cannot serve as an excuse for substituting the study of history with the endless repetition of ritual mantras about "hopelessly obsolete tanks"...

We will begin our analysis of documents related to the history of the 11th Mechanized Corps' defeat with the aforementioned "political report" from the corps' political department, signed by Regimental Commissar A.P. Andreev on July 15, 1941. First and foremost, attention should be paid to the date the document was signed. On July 15, 1941, Pavlov and his "accomplices" had already been arrested, but the trial had not yet taken place. The commanders who remained at liberty—and who were directly involved in the catastrophic rout of the Western Front's troops—could clearly feel the chill of the NKVD's execution cellars breathing down their necks. We know today that the defeat would be blamed on the "suddenness of the attack" and "obsolete tanks," but in July 1941, no one knew that yet. People who still remembered 1937 could and should have expected the worst for themselves, and this could not help but affect the content and tone of the aforementioned "political report," which contains not a shred of politics but instead a long list of "valid reasons." It is not for us to judge the commissars of 1941, but it is simply essential for a historian to take these circumstances into account.

The entire course of the 11th Mechanized Corps' combat operations is described verbatim in the "Political Report" as follows:

"...On the first day—that is, from the moment of the German air raid on Volkovysk at 4:00 a.m. on June 22—there was no communication with the headquarters of the 3rd Army or the district headquarters, and the corps units advanced independently toward the Grodno, Sokulka, and Indura areas in accordance with the developed cover plan...

Due to the withdrawal of the infantry units of the 4th Cavalry Corps, the full brunt of the fighting fell on the units of the 11th Mechanized Corps, both in covering the withdrawal of the 4th Cavalry Corps units and in delaying the German advance; The motorized rifle regiment of the 29th Tank Division, by order of the 3rd Army Commander, was held in reserve to counter airborne assaults in the Grodno area, and the division fought without infantry or artillery, suffering particularly heavy losses from enemy anti-tank artillery.

On June 22 and 23, the corps' units fought along the Konyukhi–Novy Dvor–Dombrovo front. Under enemy pressure, by June 24, units of the corps had withdrawn to the Grodno (Folesh), Kuznica, and Sokulka line, holding the front west of the Grodno–Białystok highway and railway (see Map No. 2—M.S.).

Due to the rapid withdrawal eastward from Grodno of units operating north of the Neman River, the enemy attempted to force the Neman River, aiming to cut off the corps units from the rear. However, all German attempts to force the Neman River were repelled. To halt the enemy's advance, the army ordered two motorized battalions of the 204th Motorized Division to be deployed on June 26 via Lunno to the Kotry River line. The 1st Rifle Battalion was deployed, on the corps commander's orders, to hold the bridge at Lunno.

The heavy losses sustained during the fighting from June 22 to 26, in terms of both personnel and equipment, rendered the corps largely incapable of combat. The tank divisions had no more than 300–400 men remaining (i.e., no more than 5% of their original strength. — M.S.), while the motorized divisions had only one incomplete battalion per regiment, up to 30 tanks, and up to 20 armored vehicles. All of the divisions' small rear areas were burned or bombed by enemy aircraft, which were literally chasing down individual vehicles."

That is all Commissar Andreev was able to say about the corps' destruction.

The most revealing and important aspect is what is missing from the "political report."

First, it contains not even the slightest confirmation of V. Suvorov's claims that "Soviet tank crews were shot down before they could even reach their tanks, and the tanks were burned or captured without their crews." At the moment of the notorious "surprise attack," the commanders of the 11th Mechanized Corps, even without communication with higher headquarters, simply retrieved the "red envelopes" containing cover plans from their safes and, as can be inferred from the document, reached their designated deployment areas in the shortest possible time (3–7 hours) with virtually no losses.

Second, the text contains no clear information about the enemy, in battles against whom the corps lost 9/10 of its personnel and equipment over the course of four days. But even in this regard, Commissar Andreev proved to be far more honest than later historians, who filled their trashy books with descriptions of some "encounters with heavy German tanks" that allegedly took place near Grodno.

Third, the text contains not a single mention of the existence of Boldin's Mechanized Group (of which the 11th Mechanized Corps was formally a part); there are no reports of coordination with the tank divisions of the 6th Mechanized Corps, which (according to their commanders' reports) fought on June 24–25 in the area of Sokulka, Kuznitsa, Indura—that is, literally "a few steps" away from units of the 11th Mechanized Corps, which—according to Commissar Andreev—held the Sokulka–Kuznitsa line, at the very least, until the end of the day on June 24...

Now let's turn to what is contained in the "political report."

The poorly concealed complaints against the infantry of the 4th Rifle Corps (4th RC), which opened up the front and thereby forced the mechanized corps to engage in tasks not typical for it—namely, "covering the retreat" and "delaying the German advance"—are most likely justified. In accordance with the prewar plans of the Red Army's high command, the troops of the Western Front were to deliver the main strike in a southwesterly direction, along the Siedlce–Dęblin line, "reach the Vistula River, and capture Radom with mobile units" (see Map No. 3). Consequently, the sector of the 3rd Army (the northern base of the Białystok salient) was considered a passive defensive sector. Minimal forces were allocated to it: the 4th Cavalry Corps, consisting of three divisions, and the understrength 11th Mechanized Corps.

It should be noted that, according to the plan for covering the mobilization and operational deployment of troops of the Western Special Military District, the 24th Rifle Division and the 21st Rifle Corps, consisting of two rifle divisions, were transferred to the command of the 3rd Army starting on the third day of mobilization. These units were supposed to occupy and fortify a rear defensive line on the eastern bank of the Neman River in the sector from Druskininkai to Lunno (see Map No. 2). However, in reality, none of this happened—Stalin's mysterious foreign policy "maneuvers," which to this day defy unambiguous interpretation, led to the cover plans never being put into action. As a result, on the morning of June 22, only two rifle divisions of the 4th Rifle Corps (the 27th and 56th Rifle Divisions) were holding the defense against five enemy infantry divisions in the Suwałki Salient sector. The corps' third division (the 85th Rifle Division) was in the second echelon, near the northern suburbs of Grodno. There were no other rifle units in the composition of the 3rd Army of the Western Front.

An attack by three infantry divisions of the Wehrmacht's 8th Army Corps (the 161st, 28th, and 8th Infantry Divisions) literally swept away the 56th Rifle Division, which was stretched out along a front from Lipsk to Druskininkai. As early as 10:15 a.m. on June 22, Combat Report No. 03 from the 3rd Army headquarters stated: "The enemy has broken through our lines and captured Sopotskin, Golynka, and Lipsk... Our units are withdrawing from Sopotskin and Lipsk toward Grodno..." (186, p. 138). Having lost command and become demoralized, the units were unable to establish a foothold either along the defensive line of the Grodno fortified area (as of June 1, 1941, 98 pillboxes had been built and another 606 were under construction) or along the natural barrier of the Neman River. At 1:00 p.m. on June 22, Combat Report No. 005 from the Western Front Headquarters stated that the enemy (the Wehrmacht's 161st Infantry Division) had crossed the Neman south of Druskininkai (186, p. 18).

By this time, the enemy's 256th Infantry Division had reached the Dombrowo–Lipsk line and was advancing toward Novy Dvor with its vanguard units. In the interrogation transcript of D.G. Pavlov, commander of the Western Front, who was arrested on July 4, we read: "In the afternoon of June 22, Kuznetsov (commander of the 3rd Army—M.S.) stated, his voice trembling, that all that remained of the 56th Rifle Division was its designation..." (67).

Thus, the possibility of coordinating the tank units of the 11th Mechanized Corps with the infantry of the 4th Army Corps was compromised from the outset. Moreover, the commander of the 3rd Army withdrew the 29th Tank Division's "own" motorized rifle regiment to combat mythical "airborne landings," while he withdrew the 85th Rifle Division (4th Army Corps) and the 204th Motorized Division (11th Mechanized Corps) to the Lososna River line (south of Grodno). As a result of such command decisions, the tank units of the 11th Mechanized Corps "fought without infantry or artillery." In this situation, the success or failure of the 11th Mechanized Corps' rapid but, alas, unprepared and disorganized counterattack depended entirely on the very factor that had determined the success or failure of cavalry raids in the wars of the previous century. If panic gripped the defenders, and if the commanders proved unable to control that panic, then the slaughter of the fleeing troops began—the most devastating tactic of the cavalry. If, however, the commanders maintained control over their troops during these decisive moments of battle, the virtually defenseless cavalry charge was mercilessly wiped out by the defenders' artillery and machine guns. The same thing—albeit with adjustments for different technical means of combat—would have happened to a mass of light tanks deprived of the support of their infantry and artillery.

Thanks to the efforts of contemporary local historians from Grodno, we have access to the memoirs of N.M. Kalanchuk, chief of staff of the 29th Tank Division, the commander of the 57th Tank Regiment of the same division, I.G. Cheryapkin, and the senior political officer, A.Ya. Marchenko, who from the very first hours of the war served as acting commander of the 59th Tank Regiment of the 29th Tank

Division (83rd, 184th). According to their accounts, events unfolded as follows.

N.M. Kalanchuk:

"...A motorcyclist delivered an order from the commander of the 11th Mechanized Corps, stating that the corps, using forces from the 29th Tank Division, was launching a counterstrike against Sopockin and Suwalki; to the left of Sokulka and Indura, the 33rd Tank Division would launch a counterattack in the direction of Lipsk, Augustów, and Suwałki... The offensive was to begin at 9:45 a.m. on June 22, 1941.

As the units began carrying out the order, a report was received from the reconnaissance battalion stating that 40 tanks and approximately a regiment of enemy infantry in armored personnel carriers (emphasis added by me here and below—M.S.) had broken through the rifle units of the 4th Rifle Corps and were moving toward Sopotskin and Grodno... Before reaching Sopotskin, at the line of Dojki, Golynka, and Dipsk, the division deployed into battle formations and engaged in fierce combat with the enemy's T-111 tanks and motorized infantry. In this battle, our T-34 and KV tanks distinguished themselves particularly: operating at the forefront of our tank battle formations, they began firing on the enemy tanks and crushing them like nuts, without suffering any losses. Following behind them, the T-26, BT-5, and BT-7 tanks dealt crushing blows to the enemy tanks and overran the enemy's armored personnel carriers carrying infantry.

This battle lasted about 35 minutes; enemy armored personnel carriers and tanks—including our own T-26s and BT-5s—burned like candles, and the battle area was shrouded in thick smoke. Our tank crews, despite their thin armor, fought heroically, risking their lives, and fell heroically in battle, dying the death of the brave. Finally, enemy infantry leaped out of the burning armored personnel carriers and were mowed down by direct fire from the cannons and machine guns of our glorious tank crews. When our T-34s and KV tanks crushed the enemy's column and battle formations, the enemy began to retreat and was driven back with heavy losses in tanks, armored personnel carriers, and infantry. Our tank regiments, along with a reconnaissance battalion, drove the enemy north of Sopotskin into the forest.

In this battle, the enemy lost 34 armored personnel carriers, 2] T-3 light tanks, and up to two infantry battalions. Our losses amounted to 27 T-26 and BT tanks. The KV and T-34 tanks remained intact but were all pockmarked by shell impacts. Later, by 12:00, the enemy brought up artillery and tanks. The division's units, under heavy air attack and facing superior enemy forces, withdrew to the eastern bank of the Lososna River, where they entrenched themselves and, repelling the enemy's fierce attacks, held their ground until June 25..."

I.G. Cheryapkin:

Oh... The division commander ordered our regiment to advance in a dispersed column, in combat readiness for a head-on engagement, toward Konyukhi and Golynka... Reconnaissance units sent ahead reported that up to a battalion of enemy motorized infantry, supported by tanks, had appeared in the Golynka area... As we advanced further, we soon came into direct contact with the enemy.

First, there was a clash with enemy reconnaissance units, and then the advance guard of the advancing Nazi forces appeared. In a brief battle, several German tanks and armored personnel carriers were destroyed, while the rest retreated. Immediately afterward, enemy aircraft appeared over the regiment's battle formations and subjected us to a fierce bombing raid. During this raid, the regiment's chief of staff, Major Petukhov, was seriously wounded and evacuated to the rear.

After the bombing, at least an infantry battalion, accompanied by tanks and armored personnel carriers, advanced toward us. The fascists marched with their sleeves rolled up and their uniform collars unbuttoned, firing indiscriminately from their submachine guns. I must say—it made quite an impression. It even crossed my mind that our battle formations might falter. I ordered our troops to let the Germans get closer and then open fire with precision. They did not expect serious resistance from us, and when fire from tank guns and machine guns rained down on them, they were stunned. The infantry immediately took cover. The ensuing tank duel did not end in the Nazis' favor. When more than half of the German tanks and armored personnel carriers were ablaze, the enemy began to retreat.

The regiment also suffered losses. The T-26 and BT tanks, with their gasoline engines and thin armor, burst into flames at the first shell hit. Only the KV and T-34 remained invulnerable. The regiment advanced to the Perstun–Golynka line, where it encountered strong enemy anti-tank defenses and came under continuous air attacks. In the afternoon, we withdrew to Grodno on orders.

On June 23 and 24, the regiment, as part of the division, fought against the advancing enemy southwest and south of Grodno. By the end of the third day of the war, the regiment had fewer than half of its tanks remaining..."

A.Y. Marchenko:

"...Since the commander of our regiment was absent from the assembly area for some reason, I was ordered to lead the regiment into battle. To this day, I cannot explain to myself why the division commander chose me.

At about 10:30 a.m., our column, consisting of more than 50 tanks, set out across the river along the road to Sopotskin. Halfway to the border, we encountered enemy tanks and armored personnel carriers and immediately engaged them in battle. I also remember how our fast T-26 tanks charged at the enemy T-P1 and T-1U tanks, and how German and Soviet tanks began exploding in front of and on either side of my T-34. Ours exploded more often because their armor was half as thick as the Germans'.

I don't remember how many times they attacked us, but Andrei (the driver-mechanic of the T-34 tank in which Marchenko fought—M.S.) claimed afterward that we repelled more than ten attacks. Our tank's armor was pockmarked with craters and dents from enemy shells. We were deafened by the roar of their explosions and by the bombs that rained down on us from the sky every now and then between attacks.

Another regiment of our division, commanded by Major Cheryapkin, was engaged in heavy fighting to our right.

By evening, we were forced to retreat toward Grodno. Few vehicles remained operational. A shell from a 105-mm gun struck my tank, damaging the turret mechanism and putting the gun out of commission. The tank caught fire, but we managed to put it out.

We ran out of ammunition and were running low on fuel. There were no supplies. That evening, we learned that, on orders from army headquarters, the troops were leaving Grodno, and our division was to cover their retreat. However, we received no specific instructions. I decided to return to the regiment's base to restock on everything we needed. At the supply depots, we managed to find some food and ammunition and refuel.

Attempts to contact the division headquarters were unsuccessful. None of the commanders were in the city. We decided to move toward Lida (90 km as the crow flies from Grodno) following the retreating units.

That is how the first day of the war ended for us. Later, I took part in battles in the Lida area, in the activities of the Party and Komsomol underground in the Polotsk region, and in May 1942, I led a partisan detachment..."

As we can see, the recollections of these three participants in the events coincide in almost every detail. Unfortunately, they also coincide in their rote retelling of the myths of Soviet propaganda. In the summer of '41, the Germans "were supposed" to outnumber the Red Army in tanks and to be traveling in armored personnel carriers—and yet here are three eyewitnesses speaking in unison about German tanks near Grodno, and not just any tanks, but T-Sh (Rh-Sh) tanks. Finally, the story of how "fascists with rolled-up sleeves and unbuttoned uniform collars"—numbering a single infantry battalion—launched a "psychological attack" on a Soviet tank (!!!) regiment seems downright farcical.

In fact, there wasn't a single Wehrmacht tank unit south of Druskininkai to speak of. The 12th Tank Division, part of the 3rd Tank Group and the closest to the scene of the events, was approaching Merkine at noon on June 22—that is, it was 50–60 km away from the battlefield near Sopotskiny–Grodno. There were no tanks whatsoever (and certainly no Rh-Sch medium tanks, of which there were not even enough to fully equip the tank divisions of the invasion armies' first echelon) in the Wehrmacht's infantry divisions. The only things that, in the heat of battle, could have been mistaken for a German "tank" were the "assault guns"—six battalions (189th, 191st, 192nd, 201st, 203rd, and 210th) of which (each consisting of three batteries of six self-propelled guns) were attached to the infantry divisions of the German Army Group Center. In addition, there were two more battalions (the 529th and 561st) of self-propelled "tank destroyers" (a Czech 47-mm anti-tank gun mounted on the chassis of a light Rh-1 tankette), for a total of six batteries, each with nine "tank destroyers." Thus, on average, there were five "self-propelled guns" of various types for every thirty-one infantry divisions of Army Group Center. On average. It is possible that some divisions might have had two batteries (i.e., 12 "assault guns"), but certainly not 40 Rx-Sh and Rg-GU tanks.

As for armored personnel carriers, they existed only in old Soviet war movies.

German infantry moved on foot, while the motorized infantry of motorized and tank divisions traveled in a variety of trucks, grain wagons, and captured buses. The Chief of the Wehrmacht General Staff, F. Halder, notes in his famous diary (entry dated May 22, 1941) that the 17th Panzer Division (2nd Panzer Group) had 240 vehicles of various types. By the start of the invasion of the USSR, the Wehrmacht's tank divisions had approximately 650 "Ha-nomag" half-track armored personnel carriers (M.K.Gg. 251). This is not surprising, considering that in 1939–1940, German industry (for which "all of Europe" was supposedly working) produced a total of only 569 armored personnel carriers. The entire 3rd Panzer Group of the Wehrmacht had three companies equipped with armored personnel carriers (26 APCs in each). However, in order to transport the entire infantry of the tank and motorized divisions on "Hano-mag" armored personnel carriers in June 1941, the Germans would have needed not 650, but about 25,000 armored personnel carriers. Not even that many were produced during the entire five years of the war (actual production by the end of 1943 totaled 6,500) (188, p. 262).

Of course, it was not only in the Soviet Union that military propaganda churned out heroic myths. For example, in 1942 (i.e., right in the midst of the war), Horst Slesina's book *Soldiers Against Death and

the Devil* (*8o1да1еп це^еп ТоФ ипб ТеиГеГ Спзет КатрГ 1п бег ЗомчеШтоп. Е1ере zoMaFs'e Vei-Shp§"). The author was a staff member of the Wehrmacht's propaganda service, so it is not worth looking for precise figures or truthful facts in his book. This book, however, is of immense value to the modern historian, as it begins with a chapter titled "The Tank Battle near Grodno," which describes the battle between German infantry and Soviet tanks in the vicinity of the village of Konyukhi. This is none other than the very battle that, at noon on June 22, 1941, pitted the 29th Tank Division of the 11th Mechanized Corps against the Wehrmacht's 8th Infantry Division. And although X. Slesipa concludes his account with a completely fantastical claim that "five Soviet tank regiments with nearly 600 tanks attacked units of our division," the description of the battle itself—despite all the "picturesque" propaganda hyperbole—is quite realistic:

"...Preparations for the defense are completed in a matter of seconds. Officers rush to their units... Shaking and rumbling, our assault guns roll up. These are heavy, massive tanks without turrets, their gun barrels jutting out menacingly. Although there are only a few of them—just one battery—they are the heaviest weapons in anti-tank combat. This is their crews' first battle, but they go into battle with calm and confidence. They are fully convinced of the superiority of their weapons...

The anti-tank teams have taken up their well-camouflaged positions, despite the rush. The assault guns are approaching the road from the right and left. Now we must wait... We hear the roar of engines and the screech and clatter of tank tracks. They're rolling in! They're painted a brownish-earth color, with long gun barrels—there are five, six, and a few more... These are light and medium tanks, plus a few armored personnel carriers... Closer, even closer. Now every detail is visible. Their turrets are turning because they're looking for us.

Roaring, whining, and barking shots! Tracer rounds from anti-tank guns reach the enemy with their fiery "fingers." The lower rumble of assault guns. Machine guns firing special rounds hammer away at the sides of the tanks. The lead tanks are getting a hot welcome. The first two shells from our two assault guns hit the most advanced heavy tank and tear off its turret with simply staggering force. It was hurled several meters into the air. A tall column of fire, a flash, and the impact of exploding ammunition; the tanks' fuel tanks soar into the sky—at that moment, five columns of smoke and fire rise before us. Five Soviet tanks were literally shredded and torn to pieces.

New targets! The remaining Soviet tanks have joined the battle and are stubbornly firing at our positions over the wrecks of their destroyed and disabled tanks. The billowing dust, gunpowder smoke, and smoke from burning oil conceal us. The Russians are firing frantically from their machine guns and cannons. The anti-tank gun on the right side of the road has been knocked out. Shrapnel, steel, and blood mixed with mud fall onto the yellow sand... The images are etched into my mind with great clarity. A Russian tank rolls forward: 40 meters, 30 meters... Why isn't the assault gun firing? Fear chokes my throat. A devastating blow—fire, armor plates, the gun barrel, human bodies, burning oil, and thick, black smoke that mercifully hides the scene of horror...

This infernal noise lasts only a few minutes. The fire subsides because we have no more targets. The last tanks have turned around and disappeared. Eleven burning torches, engulfed in huge columns of smoke, litter the field..." (translated by D. Lyutik) (184).

To what "common denominator" can all these disparate and contradictory recollections of those who participated in the events be reduced? First, there was a fierce battle on June 22 between German infantry and the 29th Tank Division in the Sopotskin–Grodno area. In this battle, Soviet tank crews operated without support from aviation, artillery, or their own infantry (in X. Slesina's account, there is

not a single mention of artillery fire on German positions or of Soviet infantry appearing on the battlefield). The Wehrmacht's 8th Infantry Division (a "first wave" regular division that had been fighting since the early days of World War II) met the avalanche of Soviet tanks not with panicked screams or soldiers turning their backs and fleeing, but with fire from every weapon that could shoot ("machine guns with special bullets pelted the sides of the tanks"). The inevitable result was the failure of the tank attack and heavy losses ("the division fought without infantry or artillery, suffering particularly heavy losses from the enemy's anti-tank artillery").

The actual extent of the losses can only be estimated. The chief of staff of the 29th Tank Division reports the loss of 27 tanks. X. Slesina embellishes his account with a description of "eleven burning torches engulfed in huge columns of smoke." In a report from the intelligence section of the 9th German Army headquarters (June 23, 5:40 p.m.), we read: "On June 22, 180 tanks were put out of action; of these, the 8th Infantry Division alone destroyed 80 tanks in the battles for Grodno" (187, p. 34). If we divide the number 80 by the "inflation factor" of three—standard for combat reports—we get exactly 27 destroyed tanks, which is what N.M. Kalanchuk writes about in his memoirs.

It is considerably more difficult to determine the actual composition of the Soviet tank units that took part in the battle between the 29th Tank Division and the German infantry. According to A.Y. Marchenko (acting commander of the 59th Tank Regiment), "our column, numbering more than 50 tanks, crossed the river and set out along the road to Sopotskin." I.G. Cheryapkin, commander of the 57th Tank Regiment, writes at the beginning of his memoirs that "the regiment had about 100 tanks, including about a dozen KV and T-34 tanks." N.M. Kalanchuk, chief of staff of the 29th Tank Division, asserts that "the division's staffing levels for combat equipment and armaments were very low. For example, tanks accounted for about 66%, and even those were older models..." But 66% of the authorized strength of a Red Army tank division as of the summer of 1941 amounts to 248 tanks! As N.M. Kalanchuk writes, the division had 18 vehicles of newer types ("12 T-34 tanks, 6 KV tanks").

However—and this is the most surprising part—in X. Slesina's description of the battle, it is absolutely impossible to find any mention of one and a half to two hundred Soviet tanks. At most, the account refers to two or three dozen combat vehicles. Nor does his account mention any T-34 or KV tanks, which (according to Kalanchuk) "operating at the forefront of our tank formations, shot down enemy tanks and crushed them like nuts, without suffering any losses." And this is very strange, since a Wehrmacht propagandist would not have missed the opportunity to vividly describe the battle of German soldiers against the "Russian armored monsters." And they (the monsters) do indeed appear in the pages of his book ("Tanks! Giant tanks, the likes of which we've never seen before! Steel giants are rumbling down the hill toward us! Russian 52-metric-ton tanks with 15-centimeter guns! Terror paralyzes us. Light anti-tank guns have no effect. The shells bounce off the steel hulls like rubber balls...")—but this is actually a description of a different battle (most likely against units of the 6th Mechanized Corps that had advanced to the Kuznitsa–Indura area on June 24, 1941).

It is even more difficult to reconstruct what happened to the 29th Tank Division AFTER the first battle. The only thing that is absolutely clear is that all three participants in the battle of June 22 (the division chief of staff and the tank regiment commanders) write about it in detail and with great emotion, whereas they mention the events of June 23–25 only in passing, in a hurried, rushed manner. And from the memoirs of Senior Political Instructor A.Y. Marchenko, it follows that the first battle was also the last—having found neither their superiors nor any orders in Grodno, the 59th Tank Regiment "followed the retreating units" toward Lida. In any case, there is no clear explanation of how the loss of 30–40 tanks in one of the corps' three divisions turned, three days later, into the loss of 90% of its personnel and military equipment—which "rendered the corps virtually incapable of fighting."

The only indisputable fact is that the 11th Mechanized Corps' counterattack took place in isolation from the actions of Boldin's Mechanized Group (and General Boldin himself) and ended in the complete rout of the corps, the loss of all combat equipment, and the loss of most of its enlisted men and officers. On July 14, 1941, south of Bobruisk (350 km east of Grodno), only a group of several hundred men, led by Major General Mostovenko, commander of the 11th Mechanized Corps, managed to break out of the encirclement.

REPORT BY S.V. BORZILOV

Fortunately for historians, the combat history of the 6th Mechanized Corps (4th and 7th Tank Divisions, 29th Motorized Division) is somewhat better documented. A document survived in the depths of the "archival Gulag" and was published in the late 1980s ("Military History Journal," No. 11/1988): a report by Major General S.V. Borzilov, commander of the 7th Tank Division, to the Main Armored and Tank Directorate of the Red Army dated August 4, 1941.

A few words must be said about the author of this document. By the time the Soviet-German war began, Semyon Vasilyevich Borzilov could rightly be considered one of the most experienced and celebrated tank commanders in the Red Army. During the Finnish War, Brigade Commander Borzilov commanded the 20th Heavy Tank Brigade, which broke through the "Mannerheim Line" in the area of the infamous "Hill 65.5." The Red Army high command highly praised the role of the 20th Tank Brigade and its commander at that time. Twenty-one tankers were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, including Borzilov himself. Without in any way denying the unambiguously criminal nature of the war unleashed by Stalin, it must be acknowledged that Soviet tankers gained unique experience in breaking through the enemy's long-standing fortifications, and did so in terrain that was entirely "anti-tank."

Another undoubted achievement of the commander of the 20th Tank Brigade was the very low number of casualties suffered by the personnel of the unit under his command. Over three months of fighting in the most severe natural and climatic conditions, the 20th Tank Brigade lost 169 men killed and 338 wounded (8). This is practically nothing compared to the fact that the Red Army's total losses in that shameful Stalinist adventure exceeded 330,000 men (35).

Despite its brevity, Borzilov's report contains so much invaluable information that it is worth reading very, very carefully:

1. As of June 22, 1941, the division's personnel strength was as follows: 98 percent privates, 60 percent junior noncommissioned officers, and 80 percent commanding officers. In terms of equipment: 51 heavy tanks, 150 medium tanks, 125 BT-5-7 tanks, and 42 T-26 tanks.

2. As of June 22, the division's combat equipment supply status was as follows: 76-mm shells—1 combat load; no 76-mm armor-piercing shells; 45-mm shells—1.5 combat loads; B-70 and KB-70 gasoline—3 refueling loads, diesel fuel—1 refueling load.

3. As of June 22, the division's units continued to carry out their combat training plan and were deployed as follows: (followed by a list of units and the names of localities southwest of Białystok. — M.S.) I was unaware of the anticipated German attack, although the units were ready for battle.

4. On June 20, 1941, the corps commander held a meeting with the division commanders, at which the

task of increasing combat readiness was set; that is, orders were given to fully load shells and magazines, stow them in tanks, strengthen security at depots and warehouses, recheck the assembly areas for units in case of a combat alert, and establish radio communication with corps headquarters. The corps commander warned that these measures were to be carried out quietly, without telling anyone about them, and that training was to continue as scheduled. All these instructions were carried out on time.

5. On June 22 at 2:00 a.m., a password was received via a liaison officer regarding a combat alert with the opening of the "red package" (in the Red Army, this term referred to a package containing the operational plan for combat operations of a unit or formation, which a commander was authorized to open only by order of a higher command. — M.S.). Ten minutes later, a combat alert was declared for the division's units, and at 4:30 a.m., the division's units assembled at the combat alert assembly point.

6. Combat Operations of the 7th Tank Division. On June 22, 1941, on the orders of the corps commander, the division conducted reconnaissance with its reconnaissance battalion along the Warsaw Highway to the west; the reconnaissance operation went well. In addition, it was tasked with reestablishing contact with units of the 1st Cavalry Corps. On the first day of the war, the division had no further tasks until 10:00 p.m.

7. At 22:00 on June 22, the division received an order to move to a new assembly area—Valpa Station (east of Białystok)—and was subsequently tasked with destroying a tank division that had broken through into the Białystok area. While carrying out the order, the division encountered traffic jams on all roads caused by the disorderly retreat of the army's rear units from Białystok (the road service had not been organized). While on the march and in the assembly area from 4:00 to 9:00 a.m. and from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on June 23, the division was under constant attack by enemy aircraft. During the march and while in the assembly area until 2:00 p.m., the division sustained the following losses: 63 tanks were knocked out, and all regimental rear echelons were destroyed; the rear echelon of the 13th Regiment was particularly hard hit.

8. No enemy tank division was found in the Velsk area, so that division was not deployed. New intelligence was received: an enemy tank division had broken through between Grodno and Sokulka. At 2:00 p.m. on June 23, the division received a new mission—to move in the direction of Sokulka–Kuznica, destroy the enemy tank division that had broken through, and advance to the assembly area south of Grodno (approximately 140 km). Carrying out this mission, the division concentrated in the first half of the day on June 24 at the attack line south of Sokulka and Staro Dubno. Reconnaissance determined that there was no enemy tank division present, but rather small groups of tanks operating in coordination with infantry and cavalry.

On June 24–25, acting on orders from the corps commander and Marshal Kulik, the division launched an attack with the 14th Tank Regiment toward Staro Dubno and beyond to Grodno, and with the 13th Tank Regiment toward Kuznica and beyond to Grodno from the west; in the process, up to two infantry battalions and up to two artillery batteries were destroyed. After completing the mission, the division's units concentrated in the area of Kuznitsa and Staroye Dubno; in the process, the division lost 18 tanks, which were either burned or bogged down in the swamps. From June 23 to 26, until 9:00 p.m., the division fought a defensive battle in coordination with the 29th Mechanized Division and the 36th Cavalry Division (one of the two cavalry divisions of the 6th Cavalry Corps), launching attacks in front of the 128th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 29th Mechanized Division and the 36th Cavalry Division.

9. Fuel and lubricants were running low in the division's units; there was no way to refuel due to a lack of containers and forward depots, though they did manage to obtain a single refueling from the burned-out depots at Kuznitsa and the village of Krinki (in general, fuel and lubricants were procured however one could). By the end of the day on June 25, an order was received from the corps commander to withdraw across the Svisloch River, but it was to be carried out only upon a special signal.

According to preliminary data, the 4th Tank Division of the 6th Mechanized Corps withdrew across the Svisloch River on the night of June 26, exposing the flank of the 36th Cavalry Division. By the end of June 26, the enemy, having deployed its reserves, launched an offensive. At 2100 hours, units of the 36th Cavalry Division and the 128th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 29th Mechanized Corps began a disorderly retreat. I took measures to restore the situation, but these were unsuccessful. I gave the order to cover the retreating units of the 29th Mechanized Brigade and the 36th Cavalry Division in the area of the town of Krinki, and made a second attempt to hold back the retreating units, where we managed to hold back the 128th Motorized Rifle Regiment (this is not an enemy unit; it is our regiment from the 6th Mechanized Corps, which Borzilov is still trying to hold back. — M.S.), and on the night of June 27, I crossed the Svisloch River east of Krinki (this marked the beginning of a general, disorderly retreat).

At that time, communication with the corps headquarters was lost. Communication was restored by the end of June 27 at the crossings near Volkovysk. Units of the division fought continuously against pursuing enemy airborne units all the way from Kuznitsa and Sokulka to Slonim. On June 29 at 11:00, with the remnants of his rolling stock (3 T-34 tanks) and a detachment of infantry and cavalry, he reached the forests east of Slonim, where he fought on June 29 and 30. On June 30 at 10 p.m., he moved with his detachment into the forests and then on to the Pinsk Marshes via the route Buyayka, Velichkovichi, Postoly, Starushka Station, Gomel, and Vyazma (800 km east of Bialystok. — M.S.).

10. All equipment was left behind in the territory captured by the enemy, from Białystok to Slonim. The equipment left behind was rendered inoperable. It was abandoned due to a lack of fuel and lubricants and repair supplies. The crews joined the retreating infantry."

Such is the "brief overview" of the history of the rout of this most powerful tank formation. Let us now take a moment to catch our breath and, to begin with, draw the simplest, arithmetic conclusions from what we have read.

At the start of hostilities, the 7th Tank Division had 368 tanks, including 200 of the latest T-34s and KV tanks (i.e., more than in all the tank divisions of the Leningrad and Baltic Military Districts combined). Even before the first enemy air raids began, the division had left its permanent deployment location and suffered no losses from the "surprise attack." As a side note, even on March 19, 1999 (i.e., 10 years after the publication of Borzilov's report), *Krasnaya Zvezda* described the first day of the war for the 6th Mechanized Corps in its usual style: "Tank parks were ablaze. After floundering for some time in helpless despair, the nearly unarmed (???) tank crews, together with the infantry and border guards, went—as they used to say in the old days—into retreat... German pilots mercilessly (does the country's main army newspaper believe that the enemy should have shown mercy to those who "began to retreat"?) bombed and strafed people from low altitude..."

In fact, "during the march and while in the assembly area," the 7th Tank Division lost 63 tanks (according to General Borzilov's report—as a result of German air strikes). The 4th Tank Division of the 6th Mechanized Corps also suffered comparable losses during its advance to the starting area for the offensive. Thus, Operational Summary No. 08 of the Western Front Headquarters (dated 20:00 on

June 27, 1941) states that by 18:00 on June 24, the division had concentrated in the Lebezhany area, Novaya Mysh, having suffered losses of 20–26%, mainly due to light tanks; the KV heavy tanks, as noted in the report, withstood even direct hits from aerial bombs (186, p. 51).

During the counteroffensive on June 24–25, the 7th Tank Division engaged enemy infantry numbering up to one regiment (it can be assumed that this was the 481st Infantry Regiment of the Wehrmacht's 256th Infantry Division, which did indeed fight Soviet tanks on June 24–25 in the area of the town of Kuznitsa), losing only 18 tanks in the process, though not all of them were destroyed by German anti-tank artillery—several vehicles, as the division commander writes, simply got bogged down in the swamps.

In his report, Borzilov does not specify exactly which tanks were lost. Nevertheless, given the actual capabilities of the German air force (which will be discussed in the following chapters) and the anti-tank artillery of the German infantry divisions (as well as the attached "assault gun" battalions armed with short-barreled 75-mm guns), it can be assumed with a high degree of certainty that the division's main striking force—the newest T-34 and KV tanks—remained intact and undamaged. In another report (dated July 28, 1941), General Borzilov writes: "When our tanks appeared, the enemy tanks (in reality, these were self-propelled 'assault guns') did not engage in battle but hastily withdrew… the T-34 withstands hits from 37-mm guns perfectly, not to mention the KV" (28, p. 118).

Simple arithmetic leads us to conclude that on the morning of June 26, the 7th Tank Division must still have had 287 tanks remaining. That is not a small number—it is a very large one. None of the Wehrmacht's 17 tank divisions had

that many tanks in its ranks on June 22, 1941 (on average, there were 192 tanks per German division), not to mention the quality... And so, after three days of retreat, with virtually no contact with the enemy (not counting the completely mythical "airborne units" that were supposedly "pursuing" the retreating tank division), all that remains of Borzilov's entire division is an infantry detachment with three tanks.

The course of the division's combat operations also deserves close attention. Two days before the infamous "surprise attack," the division was placed on high combat alert. In fact, the same thing was happening in the 6th Mechanized Corps of the Western Front as in the 3rd Mechanized Corps of the Northwestern Front, whose commander on June 18 ordered "units to be brought to combat readiness in accordance with combat alert plans, but without declaring the alert itself." It is highly probable that neither of these actions was the result of "independent initiative" on the part of the corps commanders (or even the district commanders), but rather constituted the implementation of a directive from the high command that was uniform across the entire Red Army.

The order to open the "red package" was received two hours BEFORE the first artillery salvos rang out at the border (it is worth noting that the same time of receipt of the order to open the "red package" — 2:00 a.m. on June 22 — is also mentioned in many other memoirs of Western Front commanders). Thus, there can be no question of any "sudden outbreak of hostilities" as it pertains to the 6th Mechanized Corps. It is also quite noteworthy that as early as the morning of June 22, without waiting for specific instructions from Moscow or Minsk, the command of the 6th Military District conducted a reconnaissance mission "along the Warsaw Highway to the west" — a fact that provides further grounds for the assumption that the "red package" did not contain a mythical "plan to repel aggression," but rather a plan for the initial operations to invade German-occupied Poland.

The division remained in its assembly area for the entire first day of the war—and this was entirely

correct. The Western Front's main striking force was to be deployed without frantic haste, following thorough reconnaissance of the enemy and based on a well-thought-out plan of action. However, instead of all this, based on false, panicked reports, already at the end of the first day of the war (at 22:00 on June 22), the 7th Tank Division was ordered by Golubev, commander of the 10th Army, to head south toward the city of Wels to fight a nonexistent German tank division. Since there were simply no enemy tank units in the 10th Army's sector, Borzilov was unable to find them.

Then, at 2:00 p.m. on June 23, the division was tasked with finding and destroying yet another mythical enemy tank division, but this time on the exact opposite side. Columns of tanks, tractor units, and vehicles stretching for many kilometers turned around and moved north from Velsk toward the Sokulka–Kuznica area (see Map No. 2). Thus, during the first two days of the war, the division "struggled" with the reckless orders of the 10th Army command and with the disorderly retreat of the army's rear units, which had clogged all the roads of the Białystok salient.

Borzilov's division participated in Boldin's planned counterattack for two days (June 24 and 25). By this time, units of the Wehrmacht's 8th Infantry Division were crossing to the eastern bank of the Neman River and advancing on Skidel. The advance units of the 256th Infantry Division reached the Sokulka–Kuznitsa line. Thus, in the area of the counterattack by the 7th and 4th Tank Divisions of the 6th Mechanized Corps, enemy infantry units with a total strength of no more than one infantry division were present; these units had not had a single day to prepare a fortified anti-tank defense line.

Borzilov's report says virtually nothing about how the battle unfolded in the Staro Dubno–Kuznitsa area (which was, in fact, the only battle in the brief history of the 7th Tank Division). It is difficult (or, more precisely, impossible) to understand the meaning of the phrase "after completing their mission, the division's units concentrated in the Kuznitsa and Staro Dubno area." The immediate objective was to capture Grodno, followed by a breakthrough to the crossings on the Neman River near Merkine.

The 4th Tank Division, advancing on Grodno from the Indura area, was carrying out the same mission. If, after the battle, the 7th Tank Division found itself not in Grodno but in its starting area of Kuznitsa–Staroe Dubno, then there can be no question of having "completed the mission."

By sound logic, a head-on battle between German infantry and two tank divisions armed with more than 300 T-34 and KV tanks should have ended in the complete annihilation of the defenders (or their panicked flight to Grodno and beyond the Neman). If, however, we assume that the command of Army Group "Center" managed to rapidly concentrate several hundred 88-mm anti-aircraft guns and 105-mm long-range artillery pieces in the area of the 6th Mechanized Corps' counterattack (an obviously absurd assumption), then, purely theoretically, the Germans might have had a chance to destroy most of the tanks in Borzilov's division. In reality, neither of these things happened: over two days of fighting, the 7th Tank Division lost 18 tanks to enemy fire and those that sank in the swamps (i.e., no more than 6% of their total number), after which it ceased its attacks and returned to its original position.

The beginning of the end for the 7th Tank Division came with the order to withdraw across the Svisloch River, which arrived late in the evening of June 25. Major General Khatskilevich, commander of the 6th Mechanized Corps, issued this order (probably the last of his life) carrying out the directive of Western Front Commander Pavlov, who, at 4:45 p.m. on June 25, based on instructions from the Supreme Command and its representative at the Western Front headquarters, Marshal Shaposhnikov, issued a directive to the troops for a general withdrawal to the Shchara River line (80–90 km east of the Svisloch River). The good intentions—to withdraw the troops behind a natural defensive line and reorganize them there—were completely out of step with the actual situation and the real condition of

the front's troops.

"Retreat is one of the most complex types of maneuver." This statutory provision (Article 423 of the Field Regulations PU-39) was ignored and forgotten not only by the command of the Western Front but also by two generations of Soviet historians. In Soviet historiography of the war, a well-established tradition has emerged of contrasting "reckless and suicidal counterattacks" with a wise and "humane" retreat. Not to mention that the absurdity of such arguments was immediately confirmed in practice (the directive to fall back to the Shchara River line did not save the Western Front's troops, but merely "legitimized" and accelerated the disorderly flight that had by then begun everywhere), they are also completely untenable in theory.

A retreat requires the strictest discipline, continuous and firm command of the troops, and reliable communications—that is, precisely what the Western Front troops no longer possessed. A marching column (unlike dispersed combat formations or troops dug in) presents an ideal target for enemy aircraft, so the decision to retreat could only have been made under conditions where the Soviet Air Force had at least local and temporary air superiority—nothing of the sort had been (or could have been) achieved in June 1941. The very fact of a retreat inevitably demoralizes the troops, transforming a soldier from a fighter on the battlefield into a defenseless target for air attacks and enemy artillery fire—which is exactly what happened in reality. Perhaps, at the beginning of the 21st century, the time has finally come to acknowledge the obvious fact: the order to retreat "saved" the soldiers and commanders of the Western Front from an honorable soldier's death in battle, but only to replace it with an agonizing death from starvation, beatings, and dysentery in a German prisoner-of-war camp...

Returning from this straightforward (and rather bleak) theory to the history of the 7th Tank Division, we find that it was precisely after receiving the order to retreat that the following phrases appear in Borzilov's report:

"The units began a disorderly retreat... made a second attempt to hold back the retreating units... the beginning of a general disorderly retreat..."

It was precisely during this "disorganized retreat" that the Red Army's best-manned tank division turned into an infantry detachment with just three tanks.

However, Borzilov's report also cites an objective (at first glance) reason for the division's rout and the loss of nearly three hundred tanks: "a lack of fuel." It would seem there's nothing left to argue about here. No fuel—no combat-ready tank division. Alas, with all due respect to the memory of the fallen general, we will not rush to conclusions but will start by using a calculator.

The division had one refueling of diesel fuel before hostilities began. It received another one during the fighting. That makes two refuelings in total. There were three or more refueling stops for gasoline. Now let's convert these "refueling stops" into kilometers, a unit everyone understands. The most obsolete tank in the 7th Division, the T-26, had a range of 170 km on a single tank of fuel.

Three refueling stops—half a thousand kilometers. The most powerful and modern KV had the same 180 km (it's hard to haul 50 metric tons of steel). Two refueling stops for a diesel-powered KV meant 360 km. The high-speed BT tanks and medium T-34s had a range of 300 kilometers or more on a single tank of fuel. In fact, the 7th Tank Division, meandering haphazardly along the route Białystok–Bielsk–Sokulka–Wolkowyńsk–Slonim, covered no more than 250 km during the entire period from June 22 to 29. Abandoning all the equipment "due to a lack of fuel" was completely out of the question.

Moreover, the territory of the Białystok salient was literally crammed with fuel and ammunition depots. On the eve of the war, colossal reserves of fuel—264,000 metric tons—had been concentrated in the Western Military District (68, p. 351). There were 12 (twelve) stationary fuel depots located directly within the 6th Mechanized Corps' "roaming" zone. Specifically: 920 and 1040 (Białystok), 925 and 1038 (Wielsk), 923 and 1019 (Monki), 919 and 1020 (Grodno), 929 and 1033 (Mosty), and 922 and 1044 (Volkovysk). The distances between these depots did not exceed 60–80 km (no more than a two-hour drive on a rough dirt road). To transport fuel, the 6th Mechanized Corps had 220 fuel tankers based on the ZIS-6 three-axle all-wheel-drive truck (tanker capacity: 3,200 liters).

A fully equipped mechanized corps required 1,200 metric tons of fuel for a 500-km march. In other words, with just one-tenth of the fuel reserves that were located near the abandoned tanks, the 6th Mechanized Corps could have marched from Białystok to Vladivostok. The fuel that the units of the 6th Mechanized Corps allegedly lacked to at least retreat eastward in an organized manner was more than sufficient for the rapidly advancing... enemy. The Chief of the Wehrmacht General Staff, F. Halder, noted in an entry dated July 1 that "about one-third of fuel consumption is covered by captured supplies." In absolute terms, this means that, on average, the Germans "received" 2,900 metric tons of fuel each day from Soviet depots that were theoretically unknown to them and theoretically "destroyed during the retreat." This amount alone should have been enough for all the tank divisions of the Western Front to break out of the Białystok "cauldron"—to break out together with their tanks, rather than scattering in disjointed groups through the forests...

After all, even a tank that has used up its very last drops of fuel remains a powerful weapon. Especially if it is a KV heavy tank. Especially if the fighting is taking place in Western Belarus. The few roads in the Białystok salient were something of a "mountain pass"... Just a stone's throw from the roadside lay either a centuries-old, impenetrable forest or a deadly swamp. It would be impossible to bypass an obstacle on such "gorge-like roads" even on a motorcycle—let alone in a car or a horse-drawn cart. And this means that the 50 KV tanks from Borzilov's division, buried in the ground at road intersections, could paralyze all movement of German troops for a long time: it is impossible to bypass them; no weapon in the arsenal of a German infantry division can penetrate their formidable armor; and the tank's own armament (a long-barreled 76-mm gun) is capable of reliably destroying any target (a car, an artillery tractor, armored personnel carrier, tank) that might have been encountered on the battlefields of June 1941...

As for the history of the 4th Tank Division of the 6th Mechanized Corps, it remains shrouded in mystery to this day. The documents have been lost. The division commander, Major General Potaturchev, was taken prisoner and died in an NKVD prison in July 1947, after the war had ended. The investigation files were never published. None of the commanders of the 4th Tank Division who survived the war left behind any memoirs. The only account of this division's "combat operations" known to the author is the following excerpt from the memoirs of S.A. Afanasyev, a private tank crewman in the 8th Tank Regiment of the 4th Tank Division:

"...On the morning of June 23, we came under fire from German aircraft. Our tanks were the newest models—every single one a T-34 or KV. We took cover in the woods. At that time, Captain Rassadnev was still in command of our battalion, but from noon on June 23, I didn't see him anymore, because several times that day we scattered in all directions... We retreated through forests, swamps, and rough terrain, since all the good roads were controlled by the Germans. We left Volkovysk, Slonim, Baranovichi… We didn't even engage the enemy. It seems to me that the officers themselves were causing the panic. Right in front of the soldiers, they were tearing off their officer insignia… That's

how we made it almost to Smolensk, and there, too, we left so much equipment behind! Everyone was fleeing, abandoning equipment and weapons (tanks, artillery). I cannot say where the battles took place, since there were almost none. In our sector, we broke through a German airborne unit only one night; that was near Slonim or Stolbtsy...” (165, p. 260)

And so, the counterattack by the Red Army’s most powerful mechanized corps ended—without ever really beginning—in a complete failure and in a manner that defies explanation. Thousands of tanks—including four hundred of the newest and best in the world, the KV and T-34 models—were unable to break through the defenses of the forward units of two Wehrmacht infantry divisions (the 8th and 256th) and vanished ingloriously into the thickets of the dense forests of Western Belarus.

“ALONG FAMILIAR ROADS...”

The weakest link in Boldin’s Military District was, of course, the 6th Cavalry Corps (the 6th and 36th Cavalry Divisions). Nevertheless, it was precisely this corps that caused the Germans such significant trouble that it was even mentioned in the diary of the Chief of the General Staff of the German Army.

The word “elite” was not in common use at that time, but it is the word that best describes the 6th Cavalry Corps. The Red Army’s oldest unit (formed during the Civil War) became a veritable “training ground” for its top commanders. In the fall of 1919, S. K. Timoshenko—the future marshal, People’s Commissar of Defense of the USSR, and twice Hero of the Soviet Union—became commander of the 6th Cavalry Division. The following year, in 1920, K. A. Meretskov—the future marshal, Hero of the Soviet Union, Chief of the General Staff, and Deputy People’s Commissar of Defense—became deputy chief of staff of the 6th Cavalry Division. In the mid-1930s, the 6th Cavalry Corps was commanded by G. K. Zhukov—a future marshal, Chief of the General Staff (after Meretskov), First Deputy to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief (i.e., Comrade Stalin himself) during the war, and the only person in history to be awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union four times. In the fall of 1939, another future marshal—A. I. Eremenko—led the 6th Cavalry Corps into battle against the “White Poles.” Future Marshal K. S. Moskalenko also served as chief of staff of an artillery regiment in that same 6th Cavalry Division.

In September 1939, the 6th Cavalry Division was part of a mounted-mechanized group which, under the command of Corps Commander Boldin, “liberated” Białystok on September 22 (i.e., took the Polish city from the Germans who had captured it). The corps’ second division (the 36th Cavalry Division) also participated in the Soviet-Polish War of 1939, operating in exactly the same areas: on September 19, the 36th Cavalry Division, together with other units of the 3rd and 11th Armies, stormed and captured the city of Vilno (Vilnius). It remains only to add that by the start of the war with Germany, this truly remarkable cavalry unit was stationed in the historic Polish city of Łomża—20 km from the border. Why the Cavalry Corps found itself near the border posts is still a matter of debate, but there is no doubt that the area of actual combat operations for the 6th Cavalry Corps (Lomza, Bialystok, Grodno) had long been familiar to the corps’ soldiers and commanders. So it all began just like in that famous song from the 1930s: “Along familiar roads, following our beloved People’s Commissar, we’ll lead our warhorses...”

Speaking of horses, by the way. Our party “historians” have always discussed the use of cavalry—especially in the Belarusian marshes—with a sorrowful shake of the head, citing it as an example of the Red Army’s glaring backwardness and its complete unpreparedness to wage modern warfare. But here’s the “problem”: the Wehrmacht’s most powerful unit, the 2nd Panzer Group, commanded by the famous Guderian (the de facto creator of Germany’s armored forces), also included a cavalry division!

Moreover, for some reason, Guderian positioned it on his right (southern) flank, right in the middle of the Polesie marshes.

Soviet historians and memoirists have really gone to great lengths to “grapple” with this division! In his memoirs, Boldin went so far as to “swap saddles for parachutes” and informed his gullible readers that the German Army Group “Center” included not a cavalry division, but… an “airborne” division!

But the mystery is actually very easy to solve.

Neither Guderian nor Pavlov intended to launch a cavalry charge across the swamp. In World War II cavalry divisions, horses served as a means of transport, increasing the unit’s mobility (compared to regular infantry) many times over. In the summer of 1941, neither we nor the Germans yet had a sufficient number of off-road vehicles capable of transporting infantry units along winding forest roads, and therefore the presence of large cavalry forces was one of the Red Army’s significant advantages. Moving at a pace of 50–60 km per day (which is quite achievable for cavalry), cavalry divisions could keep up with tank units even during the most successful and rapid offensives. And when entering combat directly, both German and Soviet cavalrymen generally advanced on foot.

In practice, this simple and obvious theory played out as follows:

“...On that day, the motorized units were to advance across hilly, sandy terrain covered with dense virgin forest. Movement across it (especially for French-made vehicles) was nearly impossible... The vehicles kept getting stuck and bringing the entire column behind them to a halt, since there was absolutely no way to detour on the forest roads... Infantrymen and artillerymen were forced to constantly pull out the stuck vehicles... It was a real ordeal for the command to watch its ‘mobile’ troops grind to a halt...”

This is how G. Gott, commander of the Wehrmacht’s 3rd Panzer Group, describes the events of June 23, 1941, in his memoirs. Throughout that entire day, with virtually no combat, his motorized divisions advanced no more than 50–60 km.

Here is an excerpt from the memoirs of V. A. Grechanichenko (chief of staff of the 94th Cavalry Regiment of the 6th Cavalry Division):

“...At 11:30 p.m. on June 22, units of the division set out in two columns on a forced march toward Białystok. We covered the 75-kilometer distance without stopping. The marching columns organized themselves as they moved. There was no time for rest. By 5:00 p.m. on June 23, the division had concentrated in a forest 2 km north of Białystok... The day was already drawing to a close when we received orders to move on toward Sokulka. We completed the 35-kilometer forced march quickly...” (83).

As we can see, in the remote forests of Western Belarus, the Soviet cavalry was at least as mobile as the German motorized infantry. Of course, no horse can compete with a motor in terms of endurance or the ability to move continuously for many hours and many days. Therefore, after Roosevelt gifted Comrade Stalin 435,000 vehicles (including more than 100,000 “Studebaker” trucks with their fantastic reliability and off-road capability), the era of cavalry in the Red Army came to an end. Though not suddenly, nor immediately. The cavalry fought throughout the entire war, and even in the liberation of Prague in May 1945, nine (!) cavalry divisions took part...

It should also be noted that by the summer of 1941, sabers and lances had long since ceased to be the primary weapons of cavalry units. The structure of a Red Army cavalry division included four cavalry regiments, a tank regiment, and artillery and anti-aircraft battalions. In the armies of other countries, such a formation was usually called an “armored cavalry brigade.” The authorized strength of a cavalry division included 8,968 personnel, 7,625 horses, 64 tanks and 18 armored vehicles, 62 vehicles for various purposes (including 10 tanker trucks), 24 76-mm guns, 8 122-mm howitzers, and 16 45-mm anti-tank guns. Given the cavalry’s inherent vulnerability to air attacks, the cavalry division included numerous anti-aircraft weapons: 8 76-mm anti-aircraft guns, 12 37-mm anti-aircraft guns, and 18 anti-aircraft machine guns. A cavalry corps consisted of two cavalry divisions and a number of separate units, including a separate communications battalion and a squadron of communications aircraft (!!!) (light U-2 aircraft, capable of taking off and landing in any forest clearing, were used for this purpose).

Overall, the cavalry corps was roughly equivalent to a single motorized division, significantly surpassing it in terms of personnel strength and the number of artillery pieces. The only “drawback” (or, more accurately, distinctive feature) of cavalry formations was the absence of large-caliber (152-mm) howitzers in their arsenal. However, the cavalry corps was not designed to break through the enemy’s fortified defensive positions, which would have required heavy artillery to destroy. In a head-on battle with a German infantry division (which was precisely how the 6th Cavalry Corps was to operate), the lack of heavy howitzers was more than compensated for by the presence of a tank “battering ram” (as early as November 1940, the 6th Cavalry Division had 48 BT tanks and 9 armored vehicles in service, while the 36th Cavalry Division had 52 BT tanks and 17 armored vehicles).

After covering more than 120 km in two days along the forest roads of the Białystok salient, the 6th Cavalry Division reached the Bebża River near the town of Sidra (see Map No. 2). By this time, units of the second echelon of the Wehrmacht’s 256th Infantry Division might have been there (the division’s advance units were already in the Kuznica area, where they were engaged in combat with tanks of the 6th Mechanized Corps). The serial number of the German division itself is also noteworthy. Germany entered World War II with 86 infantry divisions in the Wehrmacht, of which only 35—the so-called “first-wave divisions”—were regular peacetime army divisions. The 256th Infantry Division was a “fourth-wave” formation, manned by second-class reservists and conscripts from the Landwehr (i.e., the territorial militia). This division did not participate in the Polish Campaign at all. After the defeat of France, the 256th Infantry Division was transferred to the East, where it remained inactive until June 22, 1941.

The former “second-class reservists” had not a shred of “two years’ experience in modern warfare.” Nevertheless, the head-on clash between the Wehrmacht’s 256th Infantry Division and the Red Army’s best cavalry division, as described by Grechanichenko, reads like a rout—if not of “infants,” then of completely untrained and helpless recruits:

“...Our regiment, reinforced by a single battery from an artillery division, was ordered at 4:00 p.m. on June 24 to advance as the division’s vanguard along the route through Verkholye, Zhuki, and Sidra, and to secure the division’s advance toward Grodno by successively capturing these positions. Its main forces were to follow our route... At approximately 9:00 p.m. on June 24, the lead squadron came into contact with the enemy in the Beb-zha River valley south of Sidra. The regiment commander brought the artillery into action to support the lead detachment. The enemy could not withstand the onslaught and withdrew across the river. At the same time, its artillery opened fire. Night fell. The regiment dismounted and assumed battle formation...

Starting at dawn on June 25, German artillery opened massive fire across the entire depth of the

regiment's battle formation. Enemy aircraft continuously patrolled the skies at low altitude... Within the first few hours, all of our heavy weapons were put out of action, the radio station was destroyed, and communications were completely paralyzed. The regiment suffered heavy losses, was pinned down to the ground, and was unable to carry out any active operations. Lieutenant Colonel N.G. Petrosyants was killed. I assumed command of the regiment—or, more accurately, what remained of it.

There was no communication with the divisional headquarters, and sometime toward the end of the day, at my own risk, I decided to withdraw the remnants of our units behind the Sokulka–Białystok railway line. During the retreat, I sustained a shrapnel wound. The retreat did little to improve our situation. The situation continued to deteriorate, and communication with higher headquarters was still absent... By midnight, about 300 men had gathered—from our regiment and the 48th Cavalry Regiment (i.e., 9/10 of the personnel of the two regiments were already missing. — M.S.). The group of soldiers and commanders from the 48th Regiment was led by Senior Lieutenant (consider the military rank of the commander who took command of the regiment! — M.S.) Y. Govronsky, whom I knew personally. There were other commanders among those gathered as well. After consulting with one another, they made a collective decision to retreat toward the town of Krynki..."

It is worth noting that there are other, briefer and harsher descriptions of these events:

"...On the morning of June 25, the 6th Cavalry Division, in its starting area for the offensive, came under heavy aerial bombardment, which continued until noon. The cavalrymen were scattered and began retreating in disarray into the forests..."

The retreat that had begun immediately turned into a disorderly, panicked flight:

"...A continuous stream of cars, tractors, and carts, overflowing with people, moved past us. We tried to stop the soldiers who were driving and walking alongside the refugees. But no one would listen to us. Sometimes shots rang out in response to our demands (i.e., there was still ammunition left—to shoot at their own people. —SM). Everyone was already claiming that Slonim had been captured, that German paratroopers had landed ahead, that columns of tanks had broken through, and that there was no point in defending ourselves here.

On June 28, as soon as the sun rose, enemy aircraft began a massive bombardment of the banks of the Rossa River and the Volkovyska area. In essence, on that day, the formations and units of the 10th Army ceased to exist as military units. Everything was in disarray and surging eastward like a tidal wave... When our small group reached the old border (i.e., the 1939 Soviet-Polish border—M.S.) in the second half of the day on June 30, the chaos there was just as great as on the banks of the Rossa. All the copses were crammed with vehicles, carts, field hospitals, refugees, and scattered units and groups of our troops..." (83).

It is completely unclear from Grechanichenko's account whether the "main forces of the division," which "were supposed to follow our route," appeared on the battlefield. Where was the division's main striking force—its tank regiment?

Some answers to these questions can be found in the memoirs of Private V.S. Finogenov, a turret gunner on a BA-10 armored vehicle assigned to the 35th Tank Regiment of the 6th Cavalry Division:

"...On the evening of June 22, we received an order to move toward Białystok and, together with the 6th Mechanized Corps, take part in a counterattack in the direction of Grodno. On June 23, the

regiment concentrated in a forest northeast of Białystok. Other tank units were also stationed there. Enemy aircraft systematically bombed the forest, inflicting heavy damage on our units.

That evening, the squadron was tasked with conducting reconnaissance in the Sokulka area, where the regiment was to advance and where, according to intelligence reports, German tanks had already appeared. However, we did not detect any enemy forces there. After our return from the reconnaissance mission, the regiment began moving toward Sokulka. A shortage of fuel was already being felt (the distance from Łomża to Sokulka is no more than 100 km; the cruising range of a BA-10 armored car was 260–300 km, depending on road conditions. — M.S.) and ammunition (if no enemy had been detected and the regiment had not yet engaged in combat, then where had the ammunition gone? — M.S.) Logistics support was in disarray... We never managed to find a single intact ammunition depot.

After two days of fighting in the Sokulka area (against whom? — M.S.)

the remnants of the regiment (why “remnants” already? — M.S.) began to withdraw toward Volkovysk. Due to a lack of fuel, some of the combat vehicles had to be destroyed... In the morning, on a forest road just short of Volkovysk, we came under heavy bombardment. As a result, by the time we reached Volkovysk, the regiment had only three BT-5 tanks and two BA-10 armored vehicles left operational, including ours...”

The constant complaints in documents and memoirs about a lack of ammunition—a “lack” that became apparent as early as the second or third day of the war—cannot fail to arouse extreme surprise. An astronomical amount of ammunition had been delivered to the western military districts. Without dwelling for a single second on the question of why—and for what purposes—the military leadership of this “invariably peace-loving country” had stockpiled colossal mountains of shells near the western borders, let us focus on the simplest aspect: the arithmetic.

More than forty years ago, the *Military History Journal* (No. 8/1966) was imprudent enough to inform its readers that on the eve of the war, “6,700 railcars of various types of ammunition had been stockpiled in the regional depots of the Western Special Military District.” Is that a lot? Everything is relative. At the height of the war, from March 1943 to March 1944, the Western Front consumed 16,661 railcars of ammunition. The 1st Ukrainian Front consumed 10,945 railcars of ammunition during the same period (165, p. 333). In other words, on average, the front consumed 1,000–1,400 railcars of ammunition per month of combat operations. How, then, could 6,700 railcars not have been enough for a single week?

By the most conservative estimates, half of the supplies were left behind in enemy-occupied territory—that is, precisely where Boldin’s cavalry-mechanized group was conducting (or, more accurately, was supposed to be conducting) combat operations. According to data that is by no means complete or accurate, during the first two weeks of the war along the Western Front, the following were “destroyed, left to the enemy, or blown up by the enemy” (68, pp. 86–87):

— 14.3 million rifle cartridges;

— 510,000 shells for the 45-mm gun;

— 251,000 shells for 76-mm guns;

— 155,000 shells for 122-mm howitzers;

— 130,000 shells for the 152-mm howitzer.

The BT-7 tank's ammunition load consists of 132 45-mm shells, while the T-34 tank's ammunition load consists of 77 76-mm shells. It is easy to see that even half of the above-mentioned amount of ammunition would have been sufficient to provide all the tanks and armored vehicles of Boldin's KMG with two to three combat loads of shells. On the other hand, even before hostilities began, the units themselves already had between one and one and a half combat loads of ammunition on hand in their combat vehicles and artillery ammunition boxes (see Borzilov's report above). Operations during the first days of the war could have been supported by the available ammunition stock, without any need to draw on district depots. The total ammunition supply for the tanks of the 6th Mechanized Corps amounted to approximately 105,000 rounds of 45-mm and 76-mm caliber ammunition. And that was just for the tanks; the corps also had 135 armored gun carriages and 335 "barrels" of guns, howitzers, and mortars of various calibers (8, 78). If all this deadly metal had actually rained down on the Wehrmacht's 256th Infantry Division, "only its number would have remained…"

For a reader with a poetic mind, this whole tragicomic story—with units running out of ammunition, rushing about in an area teeming with ammunition depots without firing a single shot at the enemy—will bring to mind François Villon's famous poem "I Am Dying of Thirst by the Brook." But a military tribunal (or a parliamentary commission to investigate the causes and circumstances of the collapse of the Western Front—a commission that to this day has never been established) would have been led to entirely different thoughts and questions: "Where was the command of the cavalry-mechanized group at that time? What did it do to restore order among the troops under its command?"

Having neither the practical means nor the legal right to ask these questions of General Boldin, we shall limit ourselves to a careful reading of his memoirs.

"A PICTURESQUE FOREST CORNER..."

Boldin is an extraordinary memoirist. He has a wonderful, keen memory that retains even the most insignificant details. For instance, describing his first day at war, he recalls both the stifling heat and the fact that the water in his canteen was warm and did not refresh his parched throat. Boldin describes in great detail, over dozens of pages, the story of his wanderings through the forests while surrounded. But when it comes to the main point—the preparation, execution, and results of the counterattack—he speaks very briefly, sparingly, and with boundless dishonesty.

So, the first day of the war, the evening of June 22.

"...The commander of the 10th Army leans over the map, sighs heavily, then says:

'What are we supposed to fight with? Almost all of our air force and anti-aircraft artillery have been destroyed. We're low on ammunition.

We're running out of fuel for the tanks... In the very first hours of the attack, the enemy air force carried out raids on our fuel depots. They're still burning. Fuel tank cars on the rail lines have also been destroyed...

...Major General I.S. Nikitin, commander of the 6th Cavalry Corps, arrived at the command post. He looked worried.

“How are things?” I ask the cavalry officer.

“Bad, Comrade General. The 6th Division has been routed...”

Without further comment, let’s compare this statement with an excerpt from the memoirs of V.A. Grechanichenko, chief of staff of the 94th Cavalry Regiment of that very same “crushed” 6th Cavalry Division:

“...at approximately 10:00 a.m. on June 22, we came into contact with the enemy. A firefight ensued. The Germans’ attempt to break through to Łomża on the first attempt was repelled. To our right, the 48th Cavalry Regiment held the line. At 11:30 p.m. on June 22, on the orders of Corps Commander Major General I.S. Nikitin, the division’s units set out in two columns on a forced march toward Białystok...” As we can see, there was still a long way to go before the “division’s rout”...

“...Major General M. G. Khatskilevich, commander of the 6th Mechanized Corps, arrived at the command post... Under combat conditions, the 6th Corps proved itself to be at its best. In the sector where it was defending (???), the Nazis, despite repeated attempts (???), never managed to break through. The corps suffered losses (???), but it is still combat-ready and capable of counterattacking, albeit not at full strength” (as we already know, on June 22, the 6th Mechanized Corps had no contact with the enemy at all. — M.S.).

The second day of the war, June 23, 1941.

“...By dawn, the headquarters of the 6th Mechanized and 6th Cavalry Corps had settled into a new location, in a forest fifteen kilometers northeast of Białystok. This picturesque corner of the forest also became my command post...” That’s right. And the transcript of Pavlov’s interrogation confirms that all the headquarters—which were already far from the front lines (the distance from Białystok to the border at that time was 100 km)—had moved even further away: “On the second day, the units of the 10th Army, with the exception of the army headquarters, remained in their positions. The army headquarters changed its command post, moving east of Białystok to the Valpa area...” (67).

So what were our generals doing, gathered in this “picturesque forest nook”?

“Time is running out, and I still haven’t managed to carry out Pavlov’s order to form a strike cavalry-mechanized group. The most unpleasant thing (as stated in the text—M.S.) is that I don’t know where General D.K. Mostovenko’s 11th Mechanized Corps is located. We have no communication with either it or the 3rd Army, of which it is a part...”

Shocking admissions. How could the deputy commander of the district not know the mechanized corps’ deployment area? A mechanized corps is not a needle in a haystack. There were only six of them in the entire district, and if we exclude the 17th and 20th—which were only just being formed—then there were exactly four truly combat-ready mechanized corps. It’s worth noting that the headquarters of the 11th Mechanized Corps and the 204th Motorized Division were stationed in Volkovysk (85 km east of Białystok), the 29th Tank Division was in Grodno (75 km northeast of Białystok), and the 33rd Tank Division was in the area around the town of Indura (18 km south of Grodno). In other words, the distance from the “picturesque forest retreat” where General Boldin was holed up with his staff to the divisions of the 11th Mechanized Corps was approximately 60–70 kilometers. But they never managed to cover that distance.

Right up until their final defeat on June 26–27, Boldin not only never once visited the positions of the troops under his command, but was also unable to establish any communication with the 11th Mechanized Corps. Just to be clear, Boldin's KMG consisted of two signal squadrons, a mounted signal division, three corps aviation squadrons, and eight (!) separate signal battalions. For the most meticulous readers, here are their numbers: the 4th, 7th, 124th, and 185th as part of the 6th Mechanized Corps, and the 29th, 33rd, 583rd, and 456th as part of the 11th Mechanized Corps. There were also radios: five powerful RSB radio stations with a telephone communication range of 300 km in the 6th Mechanized Corps, and two in the 11th Mechanized Corps. Did Boldin's headquarters have any radio communication equipment? Unfortunately, the author knows nothing about this, but if Boldin took refuge in a "picturesque forest nook" without bothering to equip his command post with radio communication equipment, then such actions can only be described as desertion.

"…To make matters worse, at dawn enemy bombers caught the 36th Cavalry Division on the march and decimated it. So a counterattack is now out of the question… I sat in my tent, consumed by gloomy thoughts…"

Of course, Boldin never mentioned a word about what specific forces and resources were included in the mounted-mechanized group, in what formation and with what forces the enemy was advancing, so the statement that the "disarray" of a single cavalry division made a Soviet counterattack "utterly impossible" did not seem as absurd to readers in 1962 as it actually is.

And an attentive reader has surely already noticed a very strange chronology of events: according to Boldin's account, on June 22 the 6th Cavalry Division was "crushed," at dawn on June 23 the 36th was "disorganized," there were simply no other cavalry units in the CMG, and suddenly after that, on June 25, the Chief of Staff of the Wehrmacht's Army notes in his diary that in the Grodno area, "large masses of Russian cavalry are attacking the western flank of the 8th Corps"? In general, the chronology in Boldin's memoirs is completely off:

"...Khatskilevich, who was with the units, called.

'Comrade General,' his agitated voice rang out, 'we're running out of fuel and ammunition. The tank crews are fighting bravely. But without shells and fuel, our vehicles are helpless (On June 23, the 6th Mechanized Corps was marching from the Velsk area to Kuznitsa and had not yet fired a single shot at the enemy. — M.S.).

"Can you hear me, Comrade Khatskilevich?" I raised my voice, trying to shout over the terrible roar of enemy planes flying overhead. "Hang in there! I'll take all necessary measures to provide assistance immediately."

We have no communication with front headquarters. Therefore, immediately after speaking with Khatskilevich, I sent a letter by plane to Minsk, in which I requested that fuel and ammunition be urgently airlifted..."

The ellipsis should not confuse the reader. We have not omitted anything. That—sending a letter to Minsk—was the extent of the "all measures" taken by the first deputy commander of the front.

The third day of the war.

“...The war is now in its third day. We are effectively behind enemy lines. Contact has been lost with many units of the 10th Army; we have little ammunition (???) and a complete lack (???) of fuel... Still no news from Minsk... The enemy is pressing in on us. We are fighting while surrounded (???). And our forces are dwindling. The tank crews have taken up defensive positions along a ten-kilometer strip. Three kilometers behind them is our command post...”

According to Borzilov’s report, “in the first half of the day on June 24, the 7th Tank Division concentrated on the attack line south of Sokulka and Staro Dubno.” Boldin’s command post was not 3 km, but at least 33 km from the 6th Mechanized Corps’ deployment line, and it was still very far from the encirclement...

And finally, the fifth day of the war.

“On the fifth day of the war, having run out of ammunition, the troops were forced to retreat and scattered in small groups throughout the forests” (80).

“They scattered in small groups throughout the forests.” Let’s give Boldin credit for this at least—not every Soviet general in his memoirs was capable of such candor.

That, in fact, is all that can be gleaned about the circumstances of the rout from Boldin’s memoirs. We are presented with the standard set of “force majeure” circumstances prescribed by Soviet historical scholarship: there was no communication, no fuel, and ammunition had run out.

Why was there no communication? Enemy saboteurs had cut all the wires.

Where did the fuel go? The German air force bombed all the depots.

Why weren’t the shells delivered? Well, the letter never made it to Minsk...

Unnecessary details that hinder the assimilation of the one and only truth—how many wires there were, how many saboteurs there were, what range Soviet tanks had on a single tank of fuel, how many shells are in a single transportable ammunition load, what forces the German air force could have used to bomb “all the depots,” and how many of these very depots there were in the Western Special Military District alone—are dismissed as unnecessary. Also discarded as unnecessary is the simple and indisputable truth that the Armed Forces are created precisely to operate under conditions of enemy opposition. What kind of army is this, if it is capable of fighting only when no one is interfering with it?

Perhaps the most interesting and valuable aspect of Boldin’s memoirs is what is missing from them. And to see what is missing, let us open the memoirs of another general who, during those very same days of June 1941, commanded the operations of a large mechanized formation.

So, G. Guderian, *Memoirs of a Soldier*:

“...On June 22 at 6:50 a.m., I crossed the Bug River in an assault boat... following in the tracks of the tanks of the 18th Panzer Division, I reached the bridge over the Lesna River... As I approached, the Russians began scattering in all directions... throughout the entire first half of the day on June 22, I accompanied the 18th Tank Division...

...On June 23, at 4:10, I left my command post and headed to the 12th Army Corps; from there, I traveled to the 47th Tank Corps, in the village of Bildejki, 23 km east of Brest-Litovsk. Then I headed to the 17th Tank Division, where I arrived at 8:00 a.m.... After that, I went to Pruzhany (70 km northeast of the border. — M.S.), where the command post of the tank group had been relocated...

...On June 24 at 8:25 a.m., I left my command post and headed toward Slonim (which is another 80 km deep into Soviet territory. — M.S.)... Along the way, I came across Russian infantry holding the highway under fire... I was forced to intervene and, using machine-gun fire from my command tank, forced the enemy to abandon their positions...

...at 11:30 a.m., I arrived at the command post of the 17th Tank Division, located on the western outskirts of Slonim, where, in addition to the division commander, I met the commander of the 47th Corps...” (65).

“Where, in addition to the division commander, I met the commander of the tank corps...” And this meeting of three generals took place at a field command post, a hundred meters from the line of fire. That is the whole explanation for why the Red Army found itself “without communications” on its own territory, while the German army on our territory had communications.

For decades, Party historians explained to us that communication during wartime was provided by wires (all of which were cut by German saboteurs) and radio stations (which supposedly did not exist in 1941).

But Guderian simply and clearly demonstrates that the problem of communication and command of troops is solved not by wires, but by people!

The commander of the Wehrmacht’s 17th Panzer Division’s forward echelon didn’t need to call anyone. His immediate superior—the commander of the 47th Panzer Corps—is personally directing the battle alongside him at the same command post, while their highest-ranking commander—the commander of the Panzer Group—breaks through to each of his divisions several times a day in a tank under enemy fire. Of course, this method of leadership, as demonstrated by the German generals, is dangerous. This was immediately confirmed at the command post near Slonim, where the commander of the 17th Tank Division, Lieutenant General von Arnim, was wounded (and could easily have been killed). On the other hand, the method employed by the Soviet generals (the Western Front headquarters had already reached Mogilev by June 27, 500 km from the border) proved even more dangerous—it was precisely this approach that led to the catastrophic defeat. And if Guderian had suggested to his subordinates, following General Boldin’s example, that they hole up for a week in a “picturesque forest nook” and send “letters by plane to Berlin” from there, they would, at best, have taken it as a joke—a silly and inappropriate one in the midst of war.

However, Boldin was not alone in the forest. On the morning of June 23, 1941, another general appeared at Boldin’s headquarters.

In his memoirs, Boldin explains this visit as follows:

“...I was sought out by Major General I.P. Mikhailin, the deputy commander of the district forces for the construction of fortified areas. The war had caught him at one of the construction sites. While retreating with his troops, Major General Mikhailin happened to find out where I was and came to my command post...”

General Mikhailin did not retreat “along with the troops.” He clearly outpaced them. Boldin’s command post, as the attentive reader will recall, was located 15 km northeast of Białystok, that is, 100 km from the line of pillboxes in the Grodno, Osowiec, Zambrów, and Brest fortified areas. Soldiers cannot cover 100 km on foot in a single day... But the main point, of course, is not about the kilometers—what possible need could have prompted the senior commander to venture so deep into the rear of the front? Didn’t he have anything else to do? A fortified area isn’t just a collection of concrete pillboxes. A fortified area is a military unit possessing enormous firepower and carrying out the most critical operational tasks during the defensive phase. In the early days of the war, a great deal depended on General Mikhailin and his subordinates.

And Boldin understands this perfectly well—which is why he rebrands Mikhailin as a “military builder” whom the war merely “caught at one of his construction sites.” Nothing of the sort—General Mikhailin had no connection whatsoever to the technical or engineering troops (according to the terminology used in the Red Army at the time), and his position was titled “Assistant to the District Commander for Fortified Areas.” There was no “construction” involved whatsoever. And prior to his appointment to this position (and prior to being promoted to the rank of general on June 4, 1940), Comrade Mikhailin was an army political officer. He educated soldiers and commanders “in the spirit of boundless loyalty to the native Communist Party and its great leader, Comrade Stalin...”

According to Boldin’s account, Major General Nikitin, commander of the 6th Cavalry Corps, also spent all four days (from June 23 to 26) with him in a “picturesque forest glade.” How was the commander of a mobile formation—which had received orders to advance on Grodno and then further north—intending to lead his cavalrymen while sitting in a forest near Białystok, dozens of kilometers from the battlefield? And where, meanwhile, were the commanders of the two cavalry divisions of the 6th Cavalry Corps? Why does Grechanichenko write twice that “our persistent searches for the division headquarters remained fruitless”! Why was a senior lieutenant already performing the duties of the commander of the 48th Cavalry Regiment as early as June 25? Yes, the regiment commander might have been wounded or killed, but where were his deputies, the chief of staff, the colonels, majors, and numerous captains?

An interesting mention of one of the generals of the elite 6th Cavalry Corps is found in the memoirs of Senior Sergeant Z.P. Ryabchenko. He began the war in Łomża, serving as a radio operator with the 38th Separate Signal Squadron. Moreover, Sergeant Ryabchenko worked at an RSB radio station, “which was mounted on a three-axle truck and belonged to the division headquarters.” So, as far as technical communications equipment was concerned, everything was in perfect order for the command of this division. There was, however, a great deal of confusion regarding the parties between whom Sergeant Ryabchenko was supposed to establish radio contact:

“...Then we heard a TASS broadcast. The general, his voice faltering, asked us to turn up the volume; at exactly 12:02, Comrade Molotov spoke and announced that the Soviet Union was to be considered at war with Germany—that’s when we learned the war had begun. The general and the major said goodbye to us, telling us as they left, ‘It’s going to be very hard for you, boys; this war will be unlike any other.’ They left immediately, and I never saw any of them again (emphasis mine—M.S.). Only one lieutenant remained with us; he was brave, kind, young, and fresh out of the academy—I don’t remember his last name...” (184)

There are still many chapters ahead in our book, many documents, many regiments and divisions commanded by lieutenants. Thanks to them—"the brave, young man whose last name I don’t

remember"—the war that began near Białystok ultimately ended not in Vladivostok, but in Berlin.

And the Red Army generals did have wires and radios—in vast quantities, at that. For example, in the Western Military District alone (according to a memorandum from the district's chief of staff, Major General Klimovskikh, dated June 19, 1941), the district's communications service had at its disposal 117,000 insulators, 78,000 hooks, and 261 metric tons of wire (66, p. 44). In total, as of January 1, 1941, the Red Army had 343,241 km of telephone cable and 28,147 km of telegraph cable. This amount would have been enough to wrap around the Earth's equator nine times. There were 252,376 telephone sets of all types. On average, that was more than 800 sets per division. There were, of course, significantly fewer telegraph sets—"only" 11,049 in total, including 247 "BODO" sets for encrypted communications (6, p. 623).

And there were German saboteurs behind the lines of the Red Army. Each of the Wehrmacht's four tank groups was assigned one company of saboteurs from the "Brandenburg" Special Purpose Regiment. The company consisted of 2 officers, 220 non-commissioned officers and enlisted men, including 20–30
people who spoke Russian (189, p. 55). This "immensely large horde" of enemies had only a few hours at its disposal (for reasons of secrecy, the Germans began cutting the wires only just before dawn on June 22, 1941). It is generally believed that there were more than 140,000 Soviet partisans in Belarus before the start of Operation Bagration (June 1944). The time available for cutting the wires was practically unlimited—the war had already been going on for three years, so there was no longer any need to conceal hostile actions and intentions. Did they succeed then, in June 1944, in the very same area, in cutting "all the wires" and leaving the German army without communication?

However, it was impossible in principle to leave the Red Army "without communication" using only a pair of scissors—given the enormous number of radio communication devices. To illustrate this, let's look at data from the MP-41 mobilization plan, signed by Tymoshenko and Zhukov on February 12, 1941. As of January 1, 1941, the Armed Forces of the USSR had:

— 40 front-line radio stations (RAT) (an average of 8 for each of the five future fronts);

— corps-level stations (RAF, RSB): 1,613 (an average of 18 for each rifle and mechanized corps);

— 5,909 regimental radio stations (5AK) (an average of 4 per regiment) (6, pp. 622–623).

Total: 7,566 radio stations of all types (excluding tank and aircraft radio stations). And this was as of January 1, 1941. The factories continued their "peaceful, creative work," and by June 22, the number of radio communication devices was expected to be even higher. For example, the 1941 plan called for the production of 33 RATs, 940 RSBs and RAFs, and 1,000 5AKs. For some reason, the memo on the MP-41 mobilization plan lacks data on the availability of the RAF's predecessor—the powerful (500 W) 11-AK radio station—even though there were a great many of these systems in the troops. For example, as of May 10, 1941, the Kyiv Military District (58 divisions) had 5 RAT systems, 6 RAFs, 97 RSBs, 126 11-AK stations, and 1,012 regimental 5AKs (6, p. 191). Even excluding the regimental 5AK stations, this amounts to an average of four powerful radio stations per division in the district.

The RAT complex could be considered a true marvel of 1940s technology. Its enormous power (1.2 kW) allowed for telephone communication over a distance of 600 km and telegraph communication up to 2,000 km. The transmitter's circuit design allowed it to operate on 381 fixed communication channels with automatic frequency tuning. It is worth noting that never—right up until the victorious

May of 1945— — did the Red Army possess as many RAT radio stations as it did in June 1941. And with such a high density of radio communication equipment among the troops, how could Boldin (and dozens of Stalinist commanders like him) not even locate the mechanized corps and armies entrusted to them?

In addition to the powerful vehicle-mounted radio sets listed above, the Red Army was equipped with tens of thousands of portable radio stations at the battalion and even company levels (RB, RBC, RBS, RBM) with a power output of 1–3 W and a range of 10–15 km. As of January 1, 1941, there were 35,617 such radio stations on the books—more than 100 tactical-level radio stations per division.

Of course, this was very, very few. Compared to the established staffing standards, which envisaged a degree of radio coverage within the army that was absolutely phenomenal for the early 1940s. For example, according to the organizational chart for a standard Red Army rifle division (neither tank nor motorized), adopted in April 1941, a single howitzer artillery regiment was supposed to have 37 radio stations (for 36 howitzers), an artillery regiment—25 radio stations (for 24 guns), 3 radio stations in an infantry regiment, and 5 radio stations in each of the regiment's three battalions!

Probably even the communist historians themselves felt that mere lamentations about the lack of communications equipment would not be enough to explain the causes of the unprecedented military catastrophe of the summer of '41.

That is why, well in advance—as early as the 1950s and 1960s—they "prepared a universal, magical 'magic wand.'"

And ever since then, whenever our military "historians" had to explain yet another rout, collapse, loss of personnel and equipment, failure to carry out orders, and derailment of all plans, the indomitable and omnipresent German air force would appear on the scene.

FIRE FROM THE SKY

The Air Force. The almighty German Air Force. It was the German Air Force that destroyed thousands of Soviet tanks, burned all the fuel tankers, bombed 6,700 railcars carrying ammunition, destroyed 60 regional depots storing fuel and shells, "rattled" the 36th Cavalry Division and routed the 6th Cavalry Division, and at the same time still managed to "shoot down literally every one of our vehicles" (as General Korobkov, commander of the 4th Army, said in his final statement at the trial), and with its "terrifying roar" prevented Boldin from issuing wise orders, and so on, and so on, and so on...

Of all the myths about the start of the war, this one is both the most absurd and the most deeply ingrained. Any "Maria Ivanovna" from the Department of Modern History, who can't tell a cartridge from a pontoon or a tank from a tractor, tells her students that "the German air force gained air superiority from the very first days of the war," with the same unquestioning certainty with which she explains to her grandchildren that they must obey Mom and Dad.

It's hard to argue with a widespread misconception, but let's give it a try.

To begin with, let's listen to people who know the war and military aviation firsthand.

"...On June 25, Soviet troops comprising the 11th and 6th Mechanized Corps launched a counterattack against the enemy in the Grodno area. A call came from Mogilev ordering our division to participate in

this operation in full strength. That evening, I learned from a representative of the front headquarters who had arrived to see us that, in addition to us, the counterattack was being supported by regiments of the 12th Bomber and 43rd Fighter Divisions, as well as the 3rd Long-Range Bomber Corps, commanded by Colonel Y. S. Skripke (now Marshal of Aviation). In this sector of the front, the pilots flew 780 sorties, destroying about 30 tanks, 16 artillery pieces, and up to 60 vehicles with their crews. This success inspired us..." (49).

What is particularly noteworthy about this testimony? Not even the fact that, as it turns out, it was not only the German air force that was in the air over the area of Boldin's failed KMG counterattack, but rather its final sentence.

The author of the memoirs describes the destruction of 30 tanks and 60 vehicles as a result of 780 sorties as a major, inspiring success! At the same time, let's not forget that these figures are "plucked out of thin air"—that is, taken from the pilots' own reports, and not at all from the combat loss logs of German divisions. The reliability of these reports is well known to aviation historians. The enemy's actual losses were, of course, many times smaller.

And this is considered a great success? Who is the author? Perhaps he understands the operational use of aviation even less than Mar'vanna?

Hero of the Soviet Union, commander of the 13th Bomber Aviation Division (13th BAD), Major General F.P. Polynin had become known throughout the aviation world even before the start of World War II. True, in accordance with the strict secrecy regulations in force in the Soviet Union at the time, Polynin was known only by reputation and without his last name—simply as the commander of "that very" bomber unit that, on February 23, 1938, bombed a Japanese airbase on the island of Taiwan.

This unprecedented 800-km raid over Japanese-occupied Chinese territory was organized and carried out by Polynin in such a way that Japanese air defenses were not only unable to mount any resistance but failed even to detect the very fact that 28 Soviet bombers had flown over their territory.

After the war in China—in which Polynin had participated intermittently since as early as 1933—he became commander of the 13th Army's Air Force during the Finnish War. During that war, the Soviet military aviation (whose strength in the Eastern Front by February 1940 exceeded 3,880 aircraft, including 510 aircraft of the Baltic Fleet Air Force) flew 101,000 combat sorties. This figure is comparable to the figures for air force operations in the largest battles of the Great Patriotic War (the Battle of Kursk—118,000 sorties from July 5 to August 23, 1943, and the Battle of Stalingrad—114,000 sorties from July 1942 to February 1943). The war that began on June 22, 1941, was Polynin's third, and hardly any of the commanders of German bomber wings had more combat experience than he did by that date.

Now let us turn to the memoirs of Air Marshal N.S. Skripko (50), who at that time was commander of the aforementioned 3rd Long-Range Bomber Air Corps. As early as 10:00 a.m. on June 22, his corps received an order to concentrate all forces to crush the enemy's motorized columns in the Suwalki–Alytus area. Our pilots delivered the first bombing strike against units of the 3rd Tank Group on June 22 at 3:40 p.m. in the Merkine area. In total, on that day, the three bomber regiments (the 96th, 207th, and 98th) carried out one hundred and fifty combat sorties against Gota's tank divisions.

On June 24, as N.S. Skripko writes in his memoirs, "the combat mission of the 3rd Air Corps remained the same—to destroy German tanks and motorized units of the Gota Group, which was advancing

directly on Minsk." That day, its pilots flew 170 sorties. On June 26, when German tanks had already reached the northern outskirts of Minsk, the pilots of the 3rd Air Corps flew 254 combat sorties, supporting the infantry divisions defending Minsk. It was on this very day, June 26, 1941, while attacking a column of troops from the 3rd Tank Group on the Molodechno–Minsk highway near the town of Radoshkovichi, that Captain Nikolai Frantsevich Gastello—commander of the 4th Squadron of the 207th Aviation Regiment, a veteran of the battles in Finland and at Khalkhin Gol.

As we can see, the Soviet Air Force was by no means idle. Every day, hundreds of sorties were launched against the motorized columns of G. Gota's 3rd Panzer Group, but the Wehrmacht's Panzer Group did not disappear as a result; instead, it continued to advance almost without pause. Moreover, there are almost no "traces" of these bombings in Gota's memoirs, except for a single sentence in an entry dated June 24: "In the days that followed, enemy air operations intensified." That is all. Gott complains much more frequently and at greater length about the poor roads, dust, forest fires, and torrential July rains.

In the last days of June 1941, a critical situation arose along the Northwestern Front. German tank divisions, having advanced 300–350 km from the border to the Daugava River (Western Dvina), crossed this crucial water barrier in the Daugavpils and Jēkabpils area. After that, the outcome of the defensive operation in the Baltic States depended to a great extent on whether the Soviet Air Force would be able to destroy the bridges and pontoon crossings over the Daugava as quickly as possible. On June 30, 1941, all three bomber regiments of the Baltic Fleet Air Force (1st MTAP, 57th BAP, 73rd BAP) took part in a massive air raid. A total of 99 sorties were flown that day. Thirty-four bombers were shot down by German fighters, and five made forced landings. Seventy-seven members of the flight crews were killed or went missing. Not a single bridge or crossing was destroyed.

Readers, thoroughly indoctrinated by Soviet writers, "already understood everything." Our planes were "hopelessly outdated coffins," and the pilots had "only six hours of flight time" (only Polynin, presumably, knew how to fly)—which is why the Soviet air strikes failed to have the desired effect.

To be fair, it should be noted that even military officers of the highest ranks initially offered similar assessments of the Soviet Air Force's actions in the early days of the war.

For example, the Supreme Command, in Directive No. 00285 of July 11, 1941, noted that "our air force operated primarily against German mechanized and tank forces.

Hundreds of aircraft engaged the tanks, but the desired effect was not achieved because the air force's operations against the tanks were poorly organized" (5, p. 63). This Directive was signed by Chief of the General Staff Zhukov.

In this particular case, General of the Army Zhukov was mistaken. The reason for the lack of the "desired effect" was not only, nor even primarily, "poor organization." This became evident just a month and a half later.

On August 28, 1941, Supreme Commander-in-Chief I. Stalin personally ordered (Order No. 0077) "in order to disrupt the enemy tank group's operation in the Bryansk direction, to conduct an operation from August 28 to 31 using the air forces of the fronts and the General Headquarters' reserve aviation... A total of 450 combat aircraft were to participate in the operation..." (5, p. 146). The operation by the "enemy tank group" refers to the very same redeployment of Guderian's 2nd Tank Group from the Moscow to the Kyiv direction, the wisdom of which was debated by all surviving German generals in

their postwar memoirs.

Comrade Stalin's directive was exceeded. The air operation (one of the largest during the entire initial period of the war) involved 464 aircraft (230 bombers, 55 ground-attack aircraft, and 179 fighters) (27). The High Command monitored the progress of the operation with unwavering attention. Major General I.F. Petrov, Deputy Commander of the Red Army Air Force, was entrusted with directing the air operations. On September 4, 1941, Stalin sent the following telegram to the Bryansk Front: "Bryansk. Eremenko to Petrov. The air force is performing well... I wish you success. Greetings to all the pilots. I. Stalin" (27). The next day, September 5, Stalin's greeting was supplemented by a decision from the Supreme Command to place two additional ground-attack aviation regiments and two fighter regiments at Petrov's disposal. The objective remained the same: "to rout and annihilate Guderian to the ground" (5, p. 164). In just six days of the operation, the Soviet Air Force flew approximately 4,000 sorties (27).

The result?

They failed to crush and annihilate him completely; the 2nd Tank Group routed the troops of the Bryansk Front, then the right wing of the Southwestern Front, and, after advancing 300 km under heavy fighting, closed the encirclement of the Kiev "cauldron" on September 15–17. Moreover, Guderian himself, in the seventeen pages of his memoirs devoted to the Wehrmacht's 2nd Tank Group's breakthrough into the rear of the Southwestern Front, devoted exactly three words to the actions of our air force:

"...On August 29, large enemy forces, supported by aviation, launched an offensive from the south and west against the 24th Tank Corps. The corps was forced to halt the advance of the 3rd Tank Division and the 10th Motorized Division..." (65).

"How can that be?" the reader will exclaim in bewilderment, having formed their image of the war from "anniversary" newspaper articles in which the pilots of the "N-th Regiment" repeatedly pick off German tanks like sunflower seeds. "Four thousand sorties with no noticeable result? That can't be!"

But it's actually quite simple. That was precisely the real effectiveness of the air force's weapons of that era. As early as the following year, 1942, as experience in combat operations accumulated, this very "effectiveness" was quantified in concrete figures.

In 1942, the Operational Command of the General Staff of the Air Forces of the Red Army established, in its preliminary calculations of the "combat capability standards" for the Il-2 ground-attack aircraft, that 4–5 Il-2s were required to destroy a single light tank, while destroying a single medium tank of the Rkh.1U, Rkh.Sh, or 8(iS III), 12–15 sorties would be required! (86, 166) In other words, destroying German tank groups in the summer of 1941 required not hundreds, nor even thousands, but tens of thousands of sorties. Moreover, the guidelines referred specifically to the specialized Il-2 ground-attack aircraft, and not at all to the "horizontal" (as they were called at the time) SB or DB bombers.

Even a graduate of a culinary technical school should understand that to destroy a tank, you first have to hit it, and once you've hit it, you have to penetrate its armor—and penetrate it in such a way that the "behind-the-armor effect" is sufficient to take out the crew and the mechanisms. How could a 1941 combat aircraft do this?

Let's start with task number one—aiming.

Everyone has seen an anti-tank gun. If not on the battlefield, then at least in a picture in a book.

The long, very long barrel (designed so that the shell accelerates inside it to three times the speed of sound) rests on a massive steel carriage. For greater stability, the entire structure is equipped with two long “legs” that are planted into the ground before firing. The gunner’s sole task is to aim the barrel at the target using an optical sight and screws—specifically, micrometric screws.

Meanwhile, on a pedestal at the entrance to my hometown of Samara stands an Il-2 ground-attack aircraft. The cockpit seats one person. In addition to aiming, the pilot has many other tasks during combat: his feet are on the turning pedals, his right hand is on the elevator and aileron controls, his left hand controls the engine; it’s unclear exactly how the pilot adjusts the propeller pitch, changes the supercharger mode, controls the radiator shutters, monitors the situation in the air, issues orders to subordinates (if he is a flight leader), and dodges anti-aircraft fire. The two VYA-23 rapid-fire cannons are not mounted on a massive gun carriage but on a wing subjected to severe bending and torsional stress; aiming is done “with the entire fuselage,” using sight marks on the windshield.

Is it possible to hit anything at all under such conditions? Yes, it is. But only very, very rarely. For example, during range tests (i.e., in the absence of enemy resistance) at the Air Force’s Aviation Weapons Research Center “three pilots from the 245th Fighter Aviation Regiment, all with combat experience, managed to score a total of just 9 hits on a tank, using a total of 300 shells for the ShVAK cannons and 1,290 rounds for the ShKAS machine guns.”

But hitting a tank is only the beginning. You have to penetrate its armor. That presents even more problems. Experiments showed that the best conditions for aiming were achieved during a shallow dive at a 30-degree angle to the horizon from an altitude of 500–700 meters. But under such conditions, even when the shells hit the tank’s armor, they almost always ricocheted:

“...Of the 62 hits on German medium tanks recorded during aerial firing tests at the proving ground, there was only one clean penetration (through 10-mm-thick armor), one instance of the projectile core getting stuck, 27 hits on the running gear that caused no significant damage, and the remaining hits resulted in either dents or ricochets...”

The best (i.e., most effective) results were achieved only when firing at light German tanks:

“...of the 53 hits recorded during 15 sorties, armor penetration occurred in only 16 cases; in 10 cases, the hits resulted in dents in the armor or ricochets; the remaining hits struck the undercarriage. At the same time, hits by 23-mm armor-piercing shells on the tank’s running gear did not cause any damage...”

But perhaps it was only our aircraft that were so poor and our cannons so weak, while the Germans’ were a different story? That is an entirely valid assumption. German aircraft cannons had entirely different specifications. Compared to the Soviet 23-mm Volkov–Yartsev cannon, the main German MO-ER aircraft cannon in June 1941 looked like a rusty “Zaporozhets” next to a “Mercedes-600.”

The VYA-23 aircraft cannon was originally designed to engage heavily fortified ground targets. This rather heavy (by aviation standards) 66-kilogram gun propelled a 200-gram projectile to a velocity of 900 meters per second. The MS-RR cannon from the Swiss firm “Erlikon,” which was in service on German fighters and ground-attack aircraft, was much smaller and three times lighter. But you have to pay a price for every advantage. The “Erlikon’s” low weight was due to its low muzzle energy. The

Erlikon's armor-piercing projectile weighed only 115 g and had an initial velocity of just 585 meters per second, meaning it possessed four times less kinetic energy—which is precisely what enables armor penetration—than the VYA-23 projectile. As a result, the cannon armament of German fighters and ground-attack aircraft proved completely unsuitable for combat against ground-based armored vehicles.

The most advanced "airborne tank destroyer" available to the Luftwaffe in 1941 was the twin-engine, armored Henschel Nz-129 ground-attack aircraft. In September 1941, the first six "pre-production" prototypes of this "Wunderwaffe" arrived on the Eastern Front for field trials. During the tests, it was determined that not only the MO-ER, but also its successor—the significantly more powerful 20-mm MO-151/20 aircraft cannon—failed to penetrate the armor of even the lightest Soviet tanks (the T-60 and T-70) when attacking from any direction and at any dive angle (166). To be honest, it would not have been necessary to conduct such costly tests to obtain this information—it would have sufficed to compare the MO-151's armor-penetration specifications with the armor thickness of any of the many thousands of captured Soviet tanks. Going well beyond the chronological scope of this book, we note that the results of the combat use in 1942–1943 of the modernized "Henschel" tanks, armed with the 30-mm MK-101 aircraft cannon, were not much better. The probability of hitting an average Soviet T-34-type tank was negligible—only 1–2%; in other words, to guarantee the destruction of a single T-34, it was necessary to deploy at least 40–50 armored assault vehicles!

Only attacks by "Henschel" vehicles against Soviet armored vehicles could be more or less effective. For example, the probability of destroying a BA-10-type armored vehicle when firing armor-piercing shells from MO-151 cannons (of course, under the most optimal conditions of range, visibility, etc.) reached 23–25%. In other words, to guarantee the destruction of a single BA-10 on the battlefield, it was necessary to deploy at least 8–9 armored assault vehicles (166). However, by that time, the Red Army had already lost 5,000 armored cars (abandoned on the sides of roads), so in actual combat, the "Henshels" never managed to demonstrate their "super-effectiveness"...

Of course, the armament of World War II combat aircraft was not limited to light, small-caliber cannons alone. There were also bombs of various calibers (the most common were high-explosive fragmentation bombs weighing 100–250 kg). Of course, a direct hit by an aerial bomb was enough to put a light or even medium tank out of action (the heavy KV tank, as noted in a report by the commander of the 4th Tank Division, Potaturchev, could even withstand a direct hit). But how, when dropping an unguided bomb, could one achieve this very "direct hit" if it is almost impossible to hit such a small and moving target as a tank, even with a cannon?

The accuracy of bombing runs from conventional "horizontal" bombers (as they were called, in contrast to dive bombers) depended heavily on flight altitude, visibility conditions, and the crew's skill. According to data from the Red Army Air Force Combat Training Directorate, between 1943 and 1945, the probability of hitting a 200 × 200-meter target area from an altitude of 2 km increased for Pe-2 bomber crews from an average of 64% to 74% (190). And this was under the calm conditions of a training range. In combat, under enemy anti-aircraft fire, everything became much more difficult. The probability of destroying tanks using the "Henschel" bomb load (a maximum of six 50-kg bombs) did not exceed 0.4%, even when bombing from a shallow dive (at angles of 25–30°), which made the use of these ground-attack aircraft against tanks practically pointless (166).

Dive bombers provided significantly higher bombing accuracy. For example, in 1945, experienced Pe-2 crews, when bombing from a dive (and using the latest PBP-4 sight), achieved a hit rate of 98% of dropped bombs within a 200 × 200-meter square, with an average circular error probability of 46

meters. Undoubtedly, the most successful aircraft in the dive bomber class was the German “Junkers” Stuka (Zi-87), that famous symbol of the Blitzkrieg, which features in virtually every film or television segment about the start of the war. Piloted by an experienced and physically fit pilot (g-forces upon exiting a dive reached 5–6 units), the Stuka could theoretically achieve a bombing accuracy of plus or minus 30 meters. This was an excellent result for the early 1940s. But to destroy a medium tank—let alone a heavy Soviet KV with its 90-mm armor—it was not enough to drop a bomb within 30 meters of the target. A direct hit was required, which even a diving “Junkers” could achieve only by rare chance.

Digressing slightly from the events of the war’s early stages, it is worth noting that in 1943–1945, the Luftwaffe used (primarily against naval targets) high-precision guided munitions: the RH-1400 glide bomb and the NZ-293 winged missile. Even these “marvels of technology” achieved a hit rate of only 11–14%. Moreover, this extremely expensive and scarce weaponry was, of course, not used to combat motorboats and rowboats, but to strike the largest surface ships (battleships, cruisers, aircraft carriers) ranging in length from 100 to 250 meters—which is dozens of times larger than the dimensions of even the heaviest tank.

It is no surprise that, overall, Soviet medium tank losses throughout the war were distributed as follows: 88% from enemy artillery fire (including tank guns), 8% from mines, and only 4% from aircraft! (84, p. PO) It took a radical revolution in weaponry—linked to the advent of the helicopter and the guided missile—before aviation became the most dangerous enemy of tanks. But that is an entirely different story of other wars in a different era...

And in June 1941, the only way to increase the effectiveness of air attacks against tanks was through a massive concentration of forces. An example of such a concentration is the events of June 26 described by Polyinin, when five air divisions were thrown at the Wehrmacht’s 3rd Tank Group all at once! And the result achieved that day—30 German tanks destroyed—could rightly be considered a major success.

Having concluded this necessarily lengthy technical digression from the main topic, let us turn to the central question: what air forces could the enemy have deployed “in massive numbers” against the Soviet tanks of Boldin’s Cavalry-Mechanized Group?

The famous German punctuality has made life much easier for future historians. The composition, deployment, and technical condition of the German Air Force are documented down to the day (24, 37, 38).

Thus, on the left (northern) flank of Army Group “Center,” in the sector stretching from Vilnius to Grodno, the offensive of the Wehrmacht’s 3rd Panzer Group and 9th Army was supported from the air by the Luftwaffe’s 8th Air Corps under the command of General W. Richthofen. Let’s say right away—this was one of the Luftwaffe’s finest, most experienced, and most famous formations. The air groups comprising the 8th Corps had been fighting since the very beginning of World War II, having seen action in the Polish and French campaigns, the Battle of Britain, and the Battle of Crete. They were redeployed to the Eastern Front from the Mediterranean theater of operations literally just days before the invasion began.

This is true. Or, to be more precise, it is part of the truth.

The other part—which Soviet “historians” always overlooked—is that months of continuous combat inevitably took a toll on the number and technical condition of the aircraft. In concrete terms, it looked

like this. The 8th Air Corps' bomber aviation consisted of three air groups of "horizontal" bombers (I/KO2, III/KS2, III/KSZ). With a standard Luftwaffe air group strength of 40 aircraft, by the morning of June 24, 1941, these three groups had 21, 23, and 18 airworthy aircraft, respectively. Taking into account four command aircraft, the 8th Air Corps was able to field a total of 66 bombers that day. Moreover, these were obsolete Dornier Wo-172 aircraft that had already been taken out of production.

The main striking force of the Luftwaffe's 8th Air Corps consisted of four groups of dive bombers, the Stuka Zi-87 (II/8101, III/8101, I/8102, III/8102). They were armed with 103 serviceable "Junkers." That was the number available on the morning of June 22. Then the war began, and the first losses occurred. For example, on June 24, nine "Junkers" from the 8101st were shot down by fighters of Zakharov's division (43rd Fighter Aviation Division) over Minsk and Baranovichi (and this figure—surprising for the early days of the war—is confirmed by German casualty reports).

In general, the slow-moving and lightly armored "laptezhnik" often became easy prey for fighters (especially when emerging from a dive, when both the pilot and the gunner were in a semi-unconscious state). For example, Hauptmann G. Malke, commander of Group Sh/8101, was shot down three times behind enemy lines in Soviet-held territory. Twice he managed to make his way back on his own, and the third time, on July 8, 1941, a special search party evacuated him from behind enemy lines. As early as June 23, 1941, Group I/8(02) Commander Hitchholm (63) was shot down in aerial combat over the Kaunas–Vilnius highway. The names of dozens of ordinary pilots have simply been lost to history...

To enable the reader to fully appreciate the notorious "multiple numerical superiority of the German air force," it should be noted that as of June 1, 1941, the Soviet bomber divisions that took part in the operation described by Polyinin had 453 serviceable bombers on their roster (190). And that's not counting the obsolete, heavy TB-3s. It's also worth noting that the maximum bomb load of the German Bo-172 was 1,000 kg, that of our "obsolete" SB was 1,600 kg, and that of the new DB-Zf was 2,500 kg.

A skeptical reader has probably already concluded that the 8th Luftwaffe Air Corps, which found itself within the operational zone of the Boldin KMG (and, consequently, in the pages of our narrative), was the smallest in size. Not at all. The formation of dive bombers that comprised it was the largest on the entire Soviet-German front. The 2nd Air Corps (the southern flank of Army Group "Center") had only three dive bomber groups (94 serviceable "Junkers"), and that was all. In the offensive zone of Army Groups "North" and "South" (the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Moldova), there was not a single Zi-87 dive bomber at all during the first days of the war.

Not only were the German air forces operating at the junction of the Red Army's Western and Northwestern Fronts far too small to crush two Soviet mechanized corps in three days, It is not certain that they were even deployed on a large scale to combat Boldin's cavalry-mechanized group. They were tasked with entirely different objectives.

The main task of the dive bombers was to provide fire support for the advance of tank groups. This tactic had proven highly effective during the invasion of France, and it was precisely on this coordination that all operational plans for the summer of 1941 were based. Moreover, such tactics were the only viable option in a situation where two-thirds of German tanks were armed with small-caliber guns (or had no artillery armament at all). Without air support, they simply had no means of breaking through the enemy's defensive lines. This is precisely why those two air corps (the 2nd and 8th), which included Li-87 dive bombers, operated precisely within the advance zones of the two "particularly strong tank formations" (as they were designated in the "Barbarossa" plan)—that is, Gota's and

Guderian’s tank groups.

But even on this, its primary task, the Luftwaffe command could not fully concentrate, since in the first days of the war with the USSR it had another, the foremost and most crucial task: suppressing the vastly superior forces of the Soviet Air Force.

On June 22, 1941, the Germans deployed 22 fighter air groups (66 squadrons) against the Soviet Union, comprising a total of 1,036 aircraft. They were opposed by the Soviet Air Force, which—in the western military districts alone—had 64 fighter regiments (320 squadrons) armed with approximately 4,200 aircraft (190). Another 763 fighters were part of the naval aviation forces. And that was just the tip of the iceberg! Behind the vanguard of the Soviet Air Force lay enormous reserves of aircraft, air units, and pilots. Suffice it to say that as early as the fourth day of the war (June 25), the Air Force of the Western Front received two air divisions (i.e., approximately 300–400 aircraft) transferred from the interior military districts. By the seventeenth day of the war (July 9), the Air Force of the same Western Front had received another 452 aircraft to make up for losses (53, p. 18). These figures should come as no surprise. The total number of fighter aircraft alone in the Red Army Air Force amounted to (according to the most conservative source) 11,500 aircraft (35, p. 359).

If the Germans had any chance at all of gaining air superiority in such a situation, it lay in concentrating all their air forces — including both bomber and ground-attack aircraft — on strikes against Soviet Air Force airfields, without being distracted by chasing every Soviet vehicle....

No, the author has no intention of accusing those participants in the failed counterattack—who write that German planes “were literally chasing individual vehicles”—of outright deception. A portion of the sorties that the 150 bombers of the Luftwaffe’s 8th Air Corps were able to carry out in the first days of the war were directed against Boldin’s Military-Industrial Complex. Some equipment losses were caused precisely by these raids, during which individual Luftwaffe pilots—emboldened by their impunity—did indeed chase after certain vehicles. And for the people whom the bombastic Soviet propaganda had promised that our air force would be faster than anyone else, higher than anyone else, and stronger than anyone else, such a spectacle made an exceptionally depressing impression. The staggering contrast between expectations and reality became the main reason for those exceptionally harsh assessments of the Soviet Air Force’s performance, which we encounter both in the voluminous memoirs of distinguished marshals and in the oral accounts of ordinary soldiers.

As for the reports and accounts of the generals and marshals, there is another, quite understandable aspect to this. They needed an excuse—a valid reason to explain the lightning-fast rout of the divisions, armies, and fronts entrusted to them. You couldn’t come up with a better excuse than to blame it all on the actions of the omnipresent and all-conquering German air force. That is, there used to be an even better excuse in circulation—“airborne troops”—but in recent years, people have been writing about German “airborne troops” much less frequently. Sometimes—even with a sheepish note at the bottom of the page: “Reports of airborne landings behind the N Division’s lines may be exaggerated.” I would love to live to see those brighter times when stories about how 10,000 Soviet tanks were destroyed in a week by three hundred diving “Junkers” will be accompanied by at least such timid explanations...

STUPIDITY OR TREASON?

A military setback—and a terrible military catastrophe all the more so—inevitably leads to a search for spies and suspicions of treason. This theory is not as far-fetched as it might seem at first glance. At the very least, the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army, General of the Army G.K. Zhukov, was in a

very serious mood in those days. On August 19, 1941 (exactly half a century before the GKChP coup), he sent Stalin the following report: “I believe that the enemy is very well acquainted with our entire defense system, the entire operational-strategic deployment of our forces, and is aware of our immediate capabilities. Apparently, the enemy has its own people among our very high-ranking officials who are closely involved with the overall situation...” (5, p. 361). To be fair, it should also be noted that in all of his postwar “memoirs and reflections,” Georgy Konstantinovich never once mentions this memorandum of his.

As for the author’s own opinion, I do not believe in the hypothesis of a “conspiracy by dark forces.” I don’t believe it—and that’s all there is to it. Given that the NKVD archives remain completely closed, it is impossible to say anything more meaningful than “I believe—I don’t believe.” And yet, “stepping on the chorus of his own song,” the author feels it necessary to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that even in the very brief (in fact, 10-day) history of the Western Special Military District’s combat operations, there are facts that do not fit within even the broadest framework of boundless sloppiness.

We will not argue about whether the Western Front command expected hostilities to begin soon. There is no room for debate. On the night of June 20–21 (to be precise, at 2:40 a.m. on June 21), a report was sent from the headquarters of the Western Special Military District to Moscow stating that the enemy had removed the barbed-wire barriers along the border and that the sound of engines could be heard coming from the woods (186, p. 12). The last prewar intelligence report from the Western Special Military District headquarters concluded by stating that “the main body of the German army in the sector facing the Western Special Military District had taken up its starting positions” (186, p. 15).

In this situation, the command of the Western Military District (the future Western Front)—as well as the command of the neighboring Baltic Military District—carried out a series of measures to secretly bring the troops to a state of full combat readiness for military operations, which were to begin in the coming days. Many of these orders and actions were discussed in previous chapters. However, at the very same time, events were taking place that can only be interpreted as a deliberate reduction in the combat readiness of the troops. This incredible phenomenon of contradictory actions occurring in the same military district at the same time has yet to receive a clear explanation.

For example, most of the anti-aircraft artillery of the first-echelon armies of the Western Military District was withdrawn from their units’ locations a few days before the start of the war and sent to district training camps (78). In particular, the anti-aircraft battalion of the 86th Rifle Division (10th Army) was, at the start of the war, at a training range 130 km from the division’s location, while the anti-aircraft battalions of the 6th Mechanized Corps and the entire 4th Army were at a district training range near the village of Krupki, 120 kilometers east of Minsk. This is all the more strange given that in the neighboring Kiev Military District, orders were issued that were directly opposite. Thus, on June 20, Lieutenant General Muzychenko, commander of the 6th Army of the Kiev Military District, ordered:

“...Corps, division, and regimental headquarters are to remain in place. Do not leave the area of deployment under any circumstances.

...Anti-aircraft divisions are to be urgently recalled from the Lviv assembly area to their respective formations; upon arrival, they are to be tasked with providing air cover for the divisions’ positions...” (61).

It should be noted that the Soviet military leadership had carefully studied the experience of the

German offensive in the West (in May 1940). Information was obtained from two sources at once—both German and French military attachés were stationed in Moscow. Pavlov was well aware that the "German standard" called for a massive air strike in the very first hours of the offensive. At the very least, this was discussed at length at that December (1940) meeting of senior commanders, at which Pavlov was one of the main speakers.

Furthermore. At 4:00 p.m. on June 21—at a time when the roar of thousands of engines from German troops advancing toward the Bug River could already be heard with the naked ear—the commander of the 10th Air Division, deployed in the Brest–Kobrin area, received a new coded message from the district headquarters: the order of June 20 to bring units to full combat readiness and prohibit leave was to be rescinded (44). The former division commander, Colonel Belov, claims in his memoirs that he did not even bother to convey this directive to his subordinates, but why, then, was such an order issued? And as can be judged from other accounts, this mysterious directive was carried out in some units.

For example, Lieutenant Colonel P. Tsupko writes in his memoirs that in the 13th Bomber Regiment (the Białystok–Volkovysk area), where "from dawn until dusk, squadrons of camouflaged aircraft with bombs and weapons suspended beneath them, along with their crews, stood at the ready,", a day off was announced for June 22: "...On Sunday, June 22, a day off was announced in the 13th Aviation Regiment. Everyone was delighted: they hadn't had a day off in three months... On Saturday evening, leaving Captain Vlasov, the chief staff operator, in charge, the air regiment's command, along with many pilots and technicians, left for their families in Ross..." (64). And to top it all off, on the eve of the war, the regiment's "anti-aircraft battery was withdrawn from its position and sent off to exercises."

The well-known Soviet general and historian S.P. Ivanov offers a very interesting explanation for such actions by the Soviet command:

"...Stalin sought, through the very state and behavior of the troops in the border districts, to make it clear to Hitler that calm, if not complacency, reigned among us (and why did he seek this? — M.S.). Moreover, this was done, as they say, in the most natural way possible. For example, the anti-aircraft units were at training exercises... As a result, instead of using skillful disinformation tactics to mislead the aggressor regarding the combat readiness of our troops, we actually reduced it to an extremely low level" (45).

We find even more surprising testimony in the memoirs of S.F. Dolgushin. A Lieutenant General of Aviation, Hero of the Soviet Union, and head of the Tactics Department at the Zhukovsky Air Force Academy, he entered the war as a second lieutenant in the 122nd Fighter Aviation Regiment (Novy Dvor airfield near Grodno). Sergei Fedorovich recalls:

"...On the eve of the war, I was serving at an airfield located 17 km from the border. Every day we had to be on duty... On Saturday, June 21, 1941, the district commander, Army General Pavlov, and the district air force commander, General Konets, flew in to see us... Makarov and I were sent on an aerial reconnaissance mission. Up until that day, there had been only 30 aircraft at the German airfield. We had checked this repeatedly (!!!), but on that day it turned out that more than 200 additional German aircraft had been deployed there..."

Let's not get sidetracked by discussing the sensational testimony that, as it turns out, not only German but also Soviet reconnaissance aircraft were constantly violating enemy airspace. What's more important is this: what decision did the generals make upon receiving such a report about a sharp increase in enemy forces?

“...At around 6:00 p.m., an order came from the commander to remove weapons and ammunition from the aircraft (those of a fighter wing based 17 km from the border. — M.S.). An order is an order—we removed the weapons. But we left the ammunition crates behind. On June 22 at 2:30 a.m., an alarm was sounded (the time matches exactly with numerous other accounts. — M.S.), and instead of taking off to cover the airfield, we had to urgently reinstall the cannons and machine guns on the planes. Our flight was the first to mount the cannons, and just then 15 enemy aircraft appeared...” (141, 142).

What was that?

A ridiculous coincidence?

A diabolical game by Stalin, who tried to lull Hitler into a false sense of security before stabbing him in the back, only to end up outmaneuvering himself?

A conspiracy?

Not everything is as clear as it seems in the history of the defense of the legendary Brest Fortress. In his monograph—which was classified until 1988—Sandalo writes directly and without equivocation:

“...The Brest Fortress turned out to be a trap and played a fateful role at the start of the war for the troops of the 28th Rifle Corps and the entire 4th Army... A large number of personnel from units of the 28th and 42nd Rifle Divisions remained in the fortress not because they were tasked with defending it, but because they could not leave it...” (79).

It all makes perfect sense. A fortress is built precisely to make it difficult to enter. As a result, it is difficult to evacuate a large number of people and equipment from any fortress all at once. Sandalov writes that there was only one (northern) gate for exiting the Brest Fortress in an easterly direction; from there, one had to cross the Mukhavets River, which encircles the fortress. It’s terrifying to imagine what was happening there when two rifle divisions—nearly 30,000 men—tried to break out through that “needle’s eye” under a hail of enemy shells.

Just south of Brest, in a military town 3 km from the border posts, another division was stationed: the 22nd Tank Division, part of the 14th Mechanized Corps.

“■This town,” writes Sandalov, “was located on flat terrain, clearly visible from the enemy’s side… the units were crowded together… Red Army soldiers slept on 3–4-tier bunk beds, while officers and their families lived in officers’ quarters near the barracks… When the alarm sounded, the division moved out toward the Zhabinka area and further north (i.e., back from the border! — M.S.). In doing so, the division had to cross the Mukhavets River, the Warsaw Highway, and two railroad lines... This meant that, while the division was passing through, all traffic on the highways and railroads in the Brest area was halted...”

Naturally, the Germans assessed and fully exploited the opportunities presented to them. In addition to the “own” artillery of the Wehrmacht’s 45th Infantry Division, the artillery of two neighboring infantry divisions (the 34th and 31st), twelve separate batteries, and a division of heavy mortars were deployed to shell Brest. To make their “work easier,” the Germans launched tethered balloons carrying spotters. A barrage of fire literally wiped thousands of people off the face of the earth and destroyed the vehicles and artillery that were lined up in tight rows in the open. The 98th Independent Anti-Tank Division, the

reconnaissance battalion, and some other units of the 6th and 42nd Rifle Divisions were almost completely wiped out. The 22nd Tank Division lost up to half of its tanks and vehicles; enemy shells set fire to, and subsequently blew up, the division's artillery depot and fuel and lubricants depot.

And so, after three divisions had been mowed down like targets at a firing range, and the Germans had already occupied the burning ruins of Brest by 7 a.m., the "heroic epic of the defense of the Brest Fortress"—celebrated in poetry and prose—began.

This is the perfect time to ask the age-old Russian question: Who is to blame?

The fortress, as an inanimate object, could not have played any "role." This phrase in Sandalov's monograph is merely a figure of speech. The decisions made by people played the role of a "trap." Who made them, when, and—most importantly—why?

Traditional Soviet historiography habitually attributed everything to the stupidity (naivety) of Stalin and his commanders: "An ill-considered deployment was made…" What kind of thinking would it have taken to station three divisions in a place where there should have been no one and nothing—except for border patrols and minefields?

V. Suvorov's version has become familiar to modern readers: Stalin was preparing for an invasion and therefore moved his troops right up to the border. But let's not jump to conclusions.

Everything has its limits. Setting up barracks with four-tiered bunks within mortar range of the border is preparation for the annihilation of one's own soldiers, not preparation for an offensive against neighboring territory.

And did Stalin really decide to conquer all of Europe with the strength of just the 22nd Tank Division alone? The point is that all the other 60 tank and 31 motorized divisions of the Red Army were NOT deployed near the border. I hope the reader will forgive us for not publishing the entire list, but even the mechanized corps of the first echelon were based before the war in Šiauliai, Kaunas, Grodno, Volkovysk, Białystok, Kobrin, Rovtsy, Brody, Lviv, Drohobych, Stanislav... At a distance of 50 to 100 km from the border. It was impossible, in principle, to shell them with artillery at dawn on June 22.

For the most attentive readers, I'd like to clarify that there was another division (the 41st Tank Division, part of the 22nd Mechanized Corps) that, on the eve of the war, was very close—about 12–15 kilometers from the border (in the city of Volodymyr-Volynskyi). But even 12 km is not the same as 3 km. The difference—in terms of the ability to escape the shelling—is enormous (the firing range of the main calibers of field artillery was precisely 10–12 km). Early in the morning on June 22, the commander of the 41st Tank Division opened the "red packet," and the division set off on a forced march along the highway toward Kovel. The division's combat report states: "At 4:00 a.m. on June 22, 1944, the division came under long-range enemy artillery fire and, during the mobilization, suffered losses of 10 soldiers killed..."

The most important point is that light tank divisions (and the "Brest" 22nd Tank Division was armed exclusively with T-26s) have absolutely no business being on the bank of a border river. Tanks don't start an offensive—they finish it. First, the artillery must suppress the enemy's fire system; then the infantry must establish crossings and seize a bridgehead on the enemy's bank—and only after that should a horde of tanks burst through the breach from the depths of the operational formation. This is exactly what the Red Army's chief tank commander, General Pavlov, reported to the High Command

(in December 1940); this is precisely why the “red package” designated the village of Zhabinka—25 km from the Bug River—as the concentration area for the 22nd Tank Division, and not the eastern bank of the Bug! What, then, prevented the 22nd Tank Division from being hidden in advance in the forests even further east of this very Zhabinka? If there’s one thing Belarus has plenty of, it’s forests... Who, and for what reason, herded the tank division into a camp “on flat terrain, clearly visible to the enemy”? Who, and for what reason, trapped two infantry divisions in the “mousetrap” of an ancient fortress?

We’ll begin gathering answers to these questions—as was customary in days of old—starting with the lowest-ranking officers.

E.M. Sinkovsky, on the eve of the war a major and chief of the operations section of the headquarters of the 28th Rifle Corps of the 4th Army: “The command of the 28th Rifle Corps submitted a request to the command of the 4th Army for permission to withdraw the 6th and 42nd Divisions from the fortress. Permission was not granted...” (44).

F.I. Shlykov, who on the eve of the war was a member of the Military Council (in simpler terms, a commissar) of the 4th Army: “We wrote to the district (i.e., the command of the Western Military District) —M.S.D.—asking for permission to withdraw one division, some supply depots, and a hospital from Brest. We were allowed to transfer only part of the hospital to another area...” (44).

L.M. Sandalov, a colonel and chief of staff of the 4th Army on the eve of the war, writes in his monograph on the army’s combat operations: “It was urgently necessary to change the deployment of the 22nd Tank Division, but the district command did not give its consent...”

Thus, everyone recognized the error of stationing three divisions directly along the line of border posts. However, the 4th Army command—which, in turn, was prohibited from doing so by the district command—forbade the corps command from withdrawing the divisions from Brest. Moreover, a tense struggle is underway over the issue of withdrawing troops from Brest: the corps is requesting permission to withdraw all units from the fortress, while the army command is asking the district headquarters for permission to withdraw at least one division...

And what does the district command do?

D.G. Pavlov, General of the Army and Commander of the Western Front, gave the following testimony at the trial:

“...As early as the beginning of June, I issued an order to withdraw troops (emphasis mine—M.S.) from Brest to the camps. Korobkov, however, failed to carry out my order, with the result that three divisions were routed by the enemy as they were leaving the city...”

A.A. Korobkov, Major General and commander of the 4th Army, gave the following testimony at the trial:

“... I do not admit guilt... I categorically deny Pavlov’s testimony... No one issued an order to withdraw units from Brest. I personally did not see such an order...”

Finding himself side by side with Korobkov (they were seated on the same dock), Pavlov immediately changed his testimony. The following dialogue took place between the two doomed generals:

“Defendant Pavlov:

— In June, on my orders, Popov, commander of the 28th Rifle Corps, was sent with the task of evacuating all troops from Brest to the camps by June 15.

Defendant Korobkov:

— I didn’t know about that. So Popov must be held criminally liable...” (67).

Please note, dear reader, WHAT is the subject of the dispute and the court proceedings. The generals are not arguing about whether Pavlov’s orders were correct, timely, or effective… They cannot agree with one another on whether or not an order was given to withdraw the troops from Brest. How can such a thing be a matter of dispute? Even in kindergarten, the principal’s orders are issued in writing, recorded in a logbook, and filed in a folder with ribbons. The order from the headquarters of the Western Special Military District was (or was not) issued three weeks before the start of the war. In a time of absolute peace. Did German saboteurs steal it from a safe or something? And why was this order from the district command issued “over the head” of the army commander, directly to the corps commander? That very 28th Corps, whose command, according to Major Sinkovsky, had not received not only an order but even “permission to withdraw two divisions from the Brest Fortress...”

Since we’ve brought up Brest, it’s a good time to recall the history of the defense of what, according to the Soviet command’s plans, was supposed to serve as the “Brest Fortress.” Of course, we’re not talking about the dungeons of an ancient and rather dilapidated castle, but about the Brest Fortified Area (FA No. 62).

The Volga flows into the Caspian Sea, horses eat oats, two times two equals four, and the gullible and naive Stalin demolished all the pillboxes along the old (1939) state border, while they never managed to build anything worthwhile along the new one. “Everyone knows” this. It’s mentioned in every book about the war. It’s taught in school. Everyone has united in defending this “truth”: from Viktor Suvorov to any party “historian.”

But the truth is inevitably coming to light. In Issue No. 4 of 1989, *Military History Journal*—the official publication of the USSR Ministry of Defense—published a table with figures reflecting the state of the fortified areas along the new border as of June 1, 1941. The editors generously allocated 5.5 × 2.5 cm of the magazine’s space to this table. In microscopic type, the information stated that 128 (one hundred twenty-eight) permanent firing positions had been built in the Brest Military District, and another 380 (three hundred eighty) DOSs were under construction. The tiny space did not allow us to inform readers that the completion date had been set for August 1, 1941, and that work was in full swing from dawn to dusk.

Incidentally, nothing was blown up along the old border either. On the contrary, on May 25, 1941, the government issued another decree on measures to reconstruct and rearm the “old” defensive districts. The deadline for completion was set for October 1, 1941. Some of the pillboxes in the Minsk defensive district remain intact to this day. The one-and-a-half-meter-thick concrete withstood all the artillery barrages, and when the Germans, already during the occupation of Belarus, attempted to blow up the pillboxes, they soon had to abandon the idea due to the enormous consumption of explosives, which were in short supply during the war...

Let us return, however, to Brest. As Sandalov (at that time the chief of staff of the 4th Army, within

whose sector the Brest Fortified Area was being built) writes, “All sapper units of the 4th Army and the 33rd Engineer Regiment of the district were mobilized for the construction of the Brest Fortified Area... In March–April 1941, an additional 10,000 local residents were mobilized, along with 4,000 carts... From June onward, by order of the district command, two battalions from each rifle regiment of the division were mobilized for defensive work...” (79). On June 16, the construction rush was further spurred by a resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR “On Accelerating the Bringing of Fortified Areas to Combat Readiness” (3).

Thus, we would not be far off the mark in assuming that by June 22, most of the 380 unfinished DOSs in the Brest Fortified Area were already complete or nearly complete. No one probably knows the exact figures. For example, adding up (according to the table in VIZh) the number of DOSs built in the four fortified areas of the Western Front yields a total of 332, but on the adjacent page, in the body of the article, it states that “by June 1941, 505 DOSs had been built.” Pavlov and Klimovskikh cited an even higher figure at the trial—600 (67).

Be that as it may, on average, for every kilometer of the Brest fortified area’s front line, there were three concrete boxes dug into the ground, whose walls could withstand a direct hit from a heavy field howitzer shell. One was fully constructed, and two more of the same type were partially unfinished. This was in addition to the Bug River, created by nature itself, along which the border ran at that time. But that was just the average. In reality, the Brest Fortified Region was located in one of the world’s largest marshlands (the Belarusian Polesie). In such terrain, the pillboxes were intended to cover only a few of the available road routes. Consequently, the pillboxes were not arranged in a “chain” but as separate “clusters” (defense nodes). For example, in the area of the town of Semyatyche, along the Sedlets–Belovezh road, there were 20 pillboxes manned by the 17th Machine-Gun and Artillery Battalion.

Even if we assume that not a single piece of specialized weaponry was installed in any of the pillboxes of the Brest Military District, it would still have been possible to create a continuous zone of fire coverage simply by stationing machine-gun platoons from the rifle divisions in them. The machine guns were there. According to the April 1941 organizational chart, a Red Army rifle division had 392 light machine guns and 166 heavy machine guns. According to the authorized strength. In fact, by June 22, 1941, the Red Army had 170,000 light machine guns and 76,000 heavy machine guns in service (35, p. 351). However, all these improvisations were unnecessary. As evidenced by the testimony of Pavlov, commander of the Western Front, one-third of the DOS units were already armed. Moreover, they were by no means armed with dilapidated guns, supposedly removed from fortified areas along the old border.

Comrade I.N. Shveikin entered the war as a lieutenant in the 18th Machine-Gun and Artillery Battalion of the Brest Military District. He testifies: “...the quality and combat equipment of the pillboxes were far superior to those on the old border. There, each battalion had only four guns, and the rest of the armament consisted of machine guns. Here, however, many pillboxes (45% of the total—M.S.) had one or more guns paired with machine guns... The guns operated semi-automatically. Spent cartridges fell into special chutes outside the pillboxes, which was very convenient. The fortifications were equipped with very good optics...” (44).

The reader, thoroughly indoctrinated by communist “historians,” has already understood everything: the bunkers were there, but it was just that stupid Stalin who wouldn’t allow them to be occupied—so as not to give Hitler a “pretext for an attack.” The logic is astounding. Not to mention the fact that

neither Stalin nor Hitler ever needed “pretexts” (since they could fabricate as many as they needed at any time), compared to the very fact of constructing many hundreds of concrete bunkers on the banks of a border river; manning them in the dead of night by garrisons could not “provoke” anyone or anything. That is why they were manned. Every night.

“...Toward the end of May, combat alerts became more frequent, during which we manned our pillboxes... We spent the night in the pillboxes, and in the morning, after lights out, we returned to our dugouts. In June, such alerts became almost daily. The night of June 21 was no exception. On Saturday, June 21, as usual, we watched a movie after dinner. It was striking that, unlike on previous Saturdays, there were no civilians from the nearby villages to be seen on the benches. After the movie, lights-out was sounded, but we didn’t get to sleep for long: at 2 a.m., we were roused by a combat alert, and half an hour later we were already in our pillboxes, where wagons carrying ammunition soon arrived...”

These are excerpts from the memoirs of L.V. Irin, who entered the war as a cadet in the training company of the 9th Machine-Gun and Artillery Battalion of the Grodno Military District (83). There is no reason to doubt that the Brest Military District was operating under the exact same orders and directives in the spring of 1941.

Everything is relative. The “Mannerheim Line,” which historians have mentioned a thousand and one times, had only 166 concrete pillboxes along a 135-km front, and most of these pillboxes were machine-gun emplacements with a meager supply of specialized equipment (the pillboxes in the first phase of construction had no electricity, running water, toilets, or telephone lines), and only about twenty of the so-called “million-ruble bunkers” were armed with cannons.

How was all of this utilized? The Red Army, suffering enormous losses, fought its way through the “Mannerheim Line” throughout February 1940. The Germans, meanwhile, were practically unaware of the existence of the Brest Fortified Region. In a report from the headquarters of Army Group “Center” (June 22, 1941, 8:30 p.m.), we find only a brief statement:

“The border fortifications have been breached in the sectors of all corps of the 4th Army” (i.e., precisely within the Brest Fortress defense zone) (61). Nor do we find a single mention in Guderian’s memoirs of any fighting during the breakthrough of the Brest Fortress defense line.

However, some pillboxes continued to hold out until the end of June 1941. The Germans had already occupied Białystok and Minsk, advanced to Bobruisk, and begun crossing the Berezina, yet at that time, the 3rd Company of the 17th Machine-Gun Battalion of the Brest Fortified Region held four pillboxes on the banks of the Bug River near the Polish town of Semyatych until June 30! (4) The concrete slabs withstood all the artillery barrages, and only after the Germans were able to surround the pillboxes and breach their walls with heavy high-explosive shells were they able to suppress the resistance of that handful of heroes.

And what were all the others doing? “Most of the personnel of the 17th Pulbat were retreating in the direction of Vysokoye, where the headquarters of the 62nd Fortified District was located... A group of personnel from the 18th Pulbat was also retreating in the same direction from the Brest area...” (79). This is how calmly and melancholically Sandalov describes the mass desertion that took place in the first hours of the war. It happens. War is war. In any army in the world, there is confusion, panic, and flight. That is why commanders exist in the army: to encourage some and shoot others in such situations, but ultimately ensure that the combat mission is carried out. What, then, did the commander of the 62nd Ur do when crowds of Red Army soldiers who had abandoned their firing positions rushed

to his headquarters in Vysokoye?

“The commander of the Brest Fortified Region, Major General Puzyrev, along with some of the units that had withdrawn to him in Vysokoye, withdrew to Velsk (40 km from the border—M.S.) on the very first day, and then further east...” (79). What does “withdrew” mean here? The air regiments, we are told, “relocated” deep into the rear in order to receive new aircraft there—to replace those previously abandoned at the airfields. Fair enough.

But what exactly was Comrade Puzyrev planning to receive “further east”? A new mobile pillbox on wheels?

Perhaps someone had asked him these questions. To this day, the answers remain unknown. “Born in 1890. Commandant of the 62nd Fortified District. Died on November 18, 1941. No information is available regarding his place of burial”—that is all that the *Military History Journal* reported to its readers. How, where, and under what circumstances General Puzyrev died, and why in the fall of 1941 he was still listed as the “commandant” of a nonexistent fortified district—all of this is shrouded in the thick darkness of state secrecy.

THE LADY WITH THE FIG TREE

The genre of the documentary mystery requires weaving all the plot threads together and clearly identifying the main villains. Alas, the author is unable to offer readers anything but a multitude of question marks. Alas, over the past sixty years, the true causes of the greatest and most unprecedented tragedy in Russian history have never been the subject of an authoritative judicial or, at the very least, parliamentary investigation. This situation, which would be utterly unthinkable in any civilized country, has become commonplace in our society and has long since ceased to provoke either protest or even surprise.

The only available documents—the investigation and trial materials concerning Western Front Commander D.G. Pavlov, which were declassified and published as early as the early 1990s—do not bring us any closer to answering the questions posed above. The so-called “investigators” used torture to extract a confession from Pavlov regarding his participation in fictitious conspiracies of 1937 and his ties to the “enemies of the people” arrested at that time. Not a single specific military-operational question was put to Pavlov (and, in any case, the qualifications of the Cheka “investigators” did not allow them to either formulate a question or comprehend an answer). In fact, there was no investigation at all—it was a show trial aimed at those whom Stalin had decided to sacrifice in order to further intimidate the surviving generals.

As a result, the source material at our disposal does not allow us to move beyond unverified hypotheses and leading questions. One such question arose while reading the following excerpt from Boldin’s memoirs.

So, the first day of the war. At noon, Boldin flies from Minsk to a military airfield 35 km east of Białystok.

“…Every minute counts. I need to hurry to the 10th Army. There are no passenger cars at the airfield. I take a ‘polutorka’ (‘polutorka’—a GAZ-AA truck. —M.S.), get into the cab, and instruct the driver to head to Białystok… Our “polutorka” races along the busy highway. But this isn’t ordinary traffic. What we see on the road looks more like a throng of completely bewildered people, not knowing where

they’re going or why...

...A few passenger cars came into view. Leading the way was a “ZIS-101” (an executive-class passenger car. — M.S.). Broad ficus leaves were sticking out of its open windows. It turned out to be the car of some regional official. Inside were two women and two young men.

“Is there really nothing else you have to transport at a time like this besides flowers? You’d be better off taking the elderly or children,” I said to the women. With their heads bowed, they remained silent. The driver turned away—apparently, he felt ashamed too.

Our cars went their separate ways...

...An “M-1” (a passenger car, model M-1—M.S.) appeared on the highway. Inside was an engineer from one of the fortification zone’s construction sites. I asked the engineer to fix up my one-and-a-half-ton truck, while I took his car and continued on my way to the 10th Army. I needed to get there as quickly as possible. Six o’clock in the evening. The bright sun illuminates the road...” (80).

Reread this passage, dear reader. Two or three times. It’s worth it. Here lies the key to unraveling what is commonly referred to as “the mystery of 1941.”

First of all, let’s establish the circumstances of time and place.

The encounter with the lady and the ficus tree takes place east of Białystok—that is, 100 km from the border—in the afternoon of June 22, 1941, approximately 12 hours after the outbreak of hostilities and 4–5 hours after Molotov’s address on All-Union Radio. The war has begun, and everyone already knows it.

One of the many consequences of this tragic fact is that all passenger cars, without exception, are now subject to mobilization and transfer to the military authorities. The district commander—or, in his absence, the first deputy commander of the Western Special Military District, Comrade Boldin—is now the highest authority for all military and civilian personnel in Belarus. Boldin is not rushing off to go fishing. He must urgently arrive at the headquarters of the 10th Army to form and direct the operations of the front’s main strike force. Without any exaggeration, the lives of hundreds of thousands of people depend on how quickly and in what physical condition he arrives at his destination.

Conclusion: Boldin not only had the right, but was simply obligated to transfer from the plywood cabin of a rattling, highly unreliable “one-and-a-half” truck to the leather seat of a comfortable, high-speed limousine. He—Boldin—is already at war; his time and his well-being are no longer his private concern, a matter in which he can afford to be modest.

Does Boldin himself understand this? Absolutely. He repeats several times that “we must hurry” and immediately hails the first “M” he sees. But at the same time, the powerful and reliable “government” ZIS-101 drives off, limiting itself to just a caustic remark. That remark made only the driver feel ashamed—but not the passengers in the ZIS. Their silence was their answer. After that, “our cars went their separate ways.”

In principle, this information is more than enough to determine which “regional chief” owned both this car and that ficus tree, and why the ZIS was not traveling alone but leading a “convoy of cars.”

Białystok at that time was a provincial city with a population of 150,000 and several textile factories. In Poland, it was a neglected eastern outpost; as part of the USSR, it became a remote western border region. “Some officials” in such cities rode the tram, while high-ranking officials (by local standards) drove “M” cars. There were always major problems with passenger cars in the USSR.

In Białystok, a luxury ZIS-101 could only be at the disposal of three people: the first secretary of the regional committee of the Party of Lovers of Common Property, and the heads of the regional departments of the NKVD and the NKGB. There was no room for a fourth, as they say. And only a deep-seated fear of “the authorities” can explain why the lieutenant general didn’t dare to toss the ficus onto the side of the road.

Having thus determined the ownership of the car and the woman, let us now turn our attention to the pot with the ficus.

Liberation campaigns were always accompanied by a sharp rise in the wealth of military, party, and—above all—NKVD leadership. After Victory was won with the blood of millions, this phenomenon blossomed into a lush, terry-cloth flower. They hauled it away by car, by railcar, by train. They dismantled and transported Göring’s luxurious villa to the Moscow suburbs; they melted down the Hohenzollerns’ golden crown to make a cane knob...

In January 1948, during a search of “Marshal of Victory” Zhukov’s dacha, 323 pelts of sable, monkey, and seal, 160 mink pelts, 4,000 meters of silk, wool, and other expensive fabrics, 44 carpets, 55 “valuable large-scale classical paintings in artistic frames,” and 7 boxes of porcelain and crystal tableware... During a search of Lieutenant General Telegin’s residence (a member of the Military Council of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, or, to put it simply, Zhukov’s closest associate), “over 16 kg of silver items, 218 pieces of woolen and silk fabric, 21 hunting rifles, numerous antique porcelain and faience items, furs, and tapestries by French and Flemish masters of the 17th and 18th centuries...” (182).

In 1939, these “flowers” were just beginning to bloom, but even during the “liberation campaign” in Poland, in the Soviet-occupied zone near Lviv, the property of the wife of the American ambassador to Poland, Biddle (a lady from a very wealthy family), went missing, including a huge collection of antiques. For nearly two years, the Americans pressed the Soviet Foreign Ministry to investigate the matter.

They were very surprised that in a country where private property had been abolished, 200 (two hundred) crates containing paintings, furs, carpets, silverware, and so on could have vanished without a trace. Eventually, our diplomats’ patience ran out, and on June 5, 1941, Comrade Lozovsky, Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, stated the following verbatim to U.S. Ambassador Steinhardt: “...a revolution was taking place in Western Ukraine and ‘Western Belarus’ at that time. Mr. Ambassador, you obviously think that when people are making a revolution, all they think about is how to preserve someone’s property. The Soviet government is not the guardian of Mr. Biddle’s property...” (69, p. 724) Having thus poured out their hearts, the Soviet authorities returned 47 boxes and promised to return the rest “if anything else is found.”

This whole long story is told to illustrate that the silly ficus was hardly the only valuable item in the home of Białystok’s chief official. In the fall of 1939, a “revolution” was also “taking place” there, and lovely little trinkets were disappearing from the Radziwill family castles as well.

The fact that the “first lady of Białystok” took the ficus with her suggests that the packing was done in extreme haste, in a state of terrible panic, in a state bordering on insanity.

But why?

What, exactly, frightened the lady with the ficus and her husband so much?

Answering this question is not nearly as simple as it might seem at first glance. We know this today, but it all began with gunfire at the border in the early morning of June 22, 1941. But who could have known that at noon on the very first day?

The loudspeakers boomed: “And if a formidable enemy invades us, it will be defeated everywhere and in every place.” In Moscow, Directive No. 3 was being prepared for dispatch to the troops, according to which, by June 24, combat operations were to be shifted onto enemy territory. And what doubts could there possibly be about the feasibility of these plans—given the actual balance of power between the sides? Even if there were doubts, where did such blind confidence come from that one should flee as far as the eye could see?

Did the lady’s husband, by virtue of his official position, know the true state of affairs? But in that case, there was even less reason for panic. Ten Wehrmacht infantry divisions were advancing along the 10th Army’s defensive line, a front 200 km wide. With horse-drawn artillery, without a single tank. According to our regulations, an offensive on such a front required three times as many forces. By the time the pot with the ficus was being shoved into the passenger compartment of the expensive car, the Wehrmacht’s advance units were only just finishing their crossing of the Bug River at the border. Even if we assume that the Big Boss did not believe in the Red Army’s ability to offer even the slightest resistance, there was still no reasonable cause for haste. The distance from the border to Białystok is 75–100 kilometers. There are two rivers along the way: the Narew if approaching from the southwest, and the Bebża if approaching from the north. Granted, they are not exactly major rivers—not the Dnieper or the Vistula—but without a bridge across them, an infantry division with all its various equipment cannot be ferried across. And the bridge still had to be built—and how long would it take just for a Wehrmacht division, that is, 15,000 men and 5,000 horses, to cross it?

So the Germans weren’t likely to arrive in Białystok before Thursday or Friday. There was plenty of time to prepare. There was no need to panic and grab the first ficus tree that came to hand in a fit of terror...

While the author was writing and rewriting the subsequent chapters of this sad tale, the publishing house “Ol-ma-press” released a book in 2002 titled *15 Meetings with KGB General Belchenko* (62).

This valiant Chekist, who had led the suppression of popular uprisings in Central Asia, Budapest, and Tbilisi, served as head of the NKGB Directorate in Białystok on the eve of the war. On page 129, the general asserts that he sent his wife to Minsk in a “one-and-a-half-ton truck.” If this is true, then the ficus came from the home of Kudryaev, the first secretary of the regional party committee, or from Fuki-na, the head of the NKVD Directorate. Be that as it may, Belchenko’s memoirs add extremely vivid details to the picture of the events of June 1941:

“...Around 6 a.m., the bureau of the Bialystok Regional Party Committee convened... The bureau proposed forming combat Cheka units to blow up and destroy defensive facilities, military bases, and warehouses the moment the enemy entered the city...”

Note this—no doubts, no “ifs.” By the third HOUR of the war, the Belostok comrades were already unwaveringly certain that the enemy “would enter the city.” Even faster than they would be able to evacuate the contents of the military depots.

Let us not forget, however, that in addition to the regional offices of the NKVD and the NKGB, the Cheka “dragon” in Białystok had yet another, third head—the Special Department (military counterintelligence) of the 10th Army. In 2008, M. I. Meltyukhov published the full text of a report by the head of the Special Department (at that time, this unit was called the “3rd Department”) of the 10th Army (RGVA f. 9, op. 39, d. 99, l. 330–340). According to the account of Comrade Los, a regimental commissar (in this case, a military rank rather than a position), the “combat Cheka groups,” created “for demolition and destruction,” did not wait for the enemy to enter the city:

“The panic was fueled by the fact that on the night of June 22–23, the entire Party and Soviet leadership of the Bialystok region shamefully fled. All NKVD and NKGB personnel, led by their heads, also fled.”

Los claims that Belchenko fled on the night of June 22–23. Boldin encountered the car carrying the ficus tree in the afternoon. This coincides with Belchenko’s own account:

“...on the first day of the war, I sent my family in a one-and-a-half-ton truck toward Minsk. The families of my deputies were traveling with them... The preparations took place in a flurry of activity. As always (???) happens in such cases, the most important things were forgotten. For example, my wife did not take a single document proving her identity...”

This is a fascinating detail. Did she forget to bring it—or did her husband carefully check to make sure his wife had no identification documents on her? In that case, it was a wise precaution—in case they encountered workers from the Land of the Soviets, who (for the first time in many years) had a real opportunity to express, through action, their love for the glorious

Chekists and their wives.

Part 2

SEVEN CAN’T BEAT ONE

...“YOUR LAST HOUR IS COMING, BOURGEOIS...”

The places there are marvelous. Picturesque forests—centuries-old oaks, beeches, and sycamores. Clear rivers, in which fish are still caught in abundance to this day, and fertile land. And with what music of ancient Slavic antiquity do the names of this land’s cities and rivers ring out: Goryn, Ubort, Radomyshl, Turya, Kremenets, Slavuta, Yavoriv... Alas, the history of Galicia and Volhynia is very far from a serene song of universal love. The fire of insane enmity—religious, national, and class-based—has ravaged this rich region time and again. In the mid-17th century, here near Zbarazh and Berestechko, Bohdan Khmelnytsky’s Cossacks fought ferociously against the Polish nobility, and at the beginning of the 20th century, in the very same places, the soldiers of the First Cavalry Army—celebrated by I. Babel—engaged in senseless brutality against their enemies.

It was in these places, drenched in tears and blood, within the Lutsk–Brody–Rivne triangle, that one of

the major battles of World War II—the largest tank battle of the 20th century—unfolded in late June 1941. A battle known (or, more accurately, almost unknown) as the “counterattack of the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front.”

Before delving into the circumstances of this “mighty Stalinist strike,” a brief technical note. After Eastern Poland was forcibly transformed into the western outskirts of the Soviet Union, along with the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Poles, there was also a mass “removal” of Polish-sounding place names from the map. Stanisław became Ivano-Frankivsk, Żółkiew became Nesterov, Radziwillów became Chervonoarmiysk, Krystyno-Pol became Chervonohrad, Proskurów became Khmelnytskyi, and so on. Therefore, to make things easier for the most attentive readers who wish to cross-reference this text with a map, all place names appearing in the 1941 documents will be listed alongside their modern equivalents.

Just as in the tragic story of the rout of the Western Front’s cavalry-mechanized group near Grodno, events in Ukraine also began with Directive No. 3.

Let us recall once again that at 21:15 on June 22, 1941, People’s Commissar of Defense Timoshenko ordered:

“...to encircle and destroy the enemy group advancing in the direction of Volodymyr-Volynskyi and Brody with powerful concentric strikes by mechanized corps, the entire air force of the Southwestern Front, and other units of the 5th and 6th Armies. By the end of June 24, take control of the Lublin area.”

The remaining forces of the Southwestern and Southern Fronts (the 26th, 12th, 18th, and 9th Armies) were assigned purely defensive tasks: “Secure your positions firmly and prevent the enemy from invading our territory...”

The full text of this directive was published by the *Military History Journal* only 48 years after it was signed (182), but a summary of it had been known for a long time. At the same time, every Soviet historian considered it their duty (or, more accurately, had a party assignment) to rebuke our top commanders for the fact that they, “based on an unfounded overestimation of the troops’ capabilities, issued an order that was clearly unrealistic and therefore impossible to carry out.”

Later, after the cat was finally out of the bag, and it became clear from declassified documents that the Red Army’s capabilities (composition, strength, armament, reserves, and supplies of ammunition and fuel) allowed for objectives beyond the capture of just Lublin (a mere 80 km west of the border), the focus of the criticism shifted. Now, Directive No. 3 is commonly criticized for setting completely unrealistic deadlines for carrying out the counterattack. For example, one comrade—a staff officer with extensive experience in operational departments—wrote an entire article arguing that planning and preparing for an operation of this scale requires at least a month, or better yet, two.

Let’s not argue. Let’s respect the professional’s opinion. Two is two.

But who exactly said that planning for an offensive operation and the operational deployment of troops in Western Ukraine began only late in the evening of June 22, 1941? The final prewar plans of the Southwestern Front (Kyiv Special Military District) remain classified to this day. The state that once included the territory of the Kyiv District no longer exists; all the underground agents, without exception, who provided the intelligence that enabled the development of these plans have passed

away; all the military equipment mentioned in these plans was scrapped long ago; and the traffic capacity of the road network mentioned in these plans has changed many times over the past six decades...

In short, all reasonable grounds for classifying these yellowed pages have disappeared. But no—the united ranks of veterans of Party-historical science are in unison cursing the “defector and traitor” V. Suvorov, while guarding the secret of the Grand Plan as if it were the needle that holds the life of Koschei the Immortal, which, as is well known, is in an egg, and the egg is in a hollow, and the hollow is across the sea, and so on...

But the truth is irrepressibly bursting out of the bag. In late 1991, amid a moment of slight confusion that gripped the KGB after the bronze statue of “Iron Felix” (Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Cheka) was lowered on a steel cable over a furious crowd of many thousands on August 21, one curious document emerged from the silence of the archives: “Considerations on the Plan for the Strategic Deployment of Soviet Union Forces in the Event of War with Germany and Its Allies.” The document was written in a single copy, by hand, by Major General Vasilevsky (future Marshal and Chief of the General Staff), Deputy Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Red Army. The text contains a handwritten correction by either Vatutin or Zhukov. The date of composition is not specified; judging by the content, the document was drafted no earlier than May 15, 1941. It is usually dated to this date. There are no signatures from Timoshenko or Zhukov, and there is no resolution from Stalin on the document.

Let us not get sidetracked now by discussing the course of the debate that arose following the publication of this—without exaggeration—sensational document. Especially since the public’s main attention was drawn not to the operational considerations themselves, but to a completely ordinary (if one is guided by common sense rather than propaganda clichés) phrase: “I consider it necessary under no circumstances to allow the German High Command to take the initiative; we must preempt the enemy and attack the German army at the very moment it is in the process of deployment” (6, p. 217).

This idea was quite obvious and by no means new to the Soviet military leadership. For example, as early as April 1939, K.A. Meretskov (then commander of the Leningrad Military District), speaking at a debriefing of a command-staff exercise conducted by the district’s Military Council, stated: “At the very moment when our enemies begin to mobilize their armies and move their troops toward our borders, we will not sit idly by and wait. Our operational preparations and the training of our troops must be directed toward ensuring the complete defeat of the enemy in practice even before he has had time to muster all his forces...” (1, p. 141).

Veterans of Soviet propaganda “science” have already managed to explain to anyone still willing to listen that the May “Reflections” are nothing more than a rough draft (15 pages long, with four appendices and seven maps) that General Vasilevsky jotted down out of boredom during his free time away from his main duties. While attempts were being made to confuse the public with “discussions” of this caliber, other documents were declassified and published (6, 16).

Ultimately, by the end of the 1990s, the following components of the Grand Plan had come to light:

— A memorandum from the People’s Commissar of Defense of the USSR and the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) addressed to I.V. Stalin and V.M. Molotov, “On the Principles of Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the USSR in the West and in the East,” unnumbered, no later than August 16, 1940. (Central

Archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 16, op. 2951, d. 239, l. 1–37).

— A document with the same title, but with a number (No. 103202) and the exact date of signing (September 18, 1940) (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 16, op. 2951, d. 239, l. 197–244).

— Memorandum No. 103313 from the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR and the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), addressed to I.V. Stalin and V.M. Molotov (the document begins with the words "I hereby submit for your approval the main conclusions drawn from your instructions given on October 5, 1940, during the review of the plans for the strategic deployment of the Armed Forces of the USSR for 1941," which is why it is commonly referred to as the "revised October plan for strategic deployment" (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 16, op. 2951, d. 242, pp. 84–90).

— Memorandum from the Chief of Staff of the Kiev Military District regarding the decision of the Military Council of the Southwestern Front on the deployment plan for 1940, unnumbered, no later than December 1940 (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 16, op. 2951, d. 239, l. 245–277).

— Excerpts from the report of the General Staff of the Red Army "On the Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the USSR in the West and in the East," unnumbered, dated March 11, 1940 (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 16, op. 2951, d. 241, pp. 1–16). It is noteworthy that this document—contrary to all rules and traditions governing the publication of historical documents—was declassified only with extensive redactions.

— Directive from the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR and the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army to the Commander of the Western Military District on the development of a plan for the operational deployment of the district's troops, undated, April 1941 (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 16, op. 2951, d. 237, l. 48–64).

— The aforementioned "Considerations on the Plan for the Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in the Event of War with Germany and Its Allies," undated, no earlier than May 15, 1941 (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 16, op. 2951, d. 237, l. 1–15).

The materials from the January 1941 operational-strategic war games conducted by the Red Army's senior command should also be included among the documents that effectively reveal the Soviet command's operational plans.

We are led to this conclusion not only by simple common-sense logic, but also by an article by Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky, published only in 1992 (after the author's death) by Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky, who explicitly states that "in January 1941, when the imminence of war was already quite clearly felt, the main points of the operational plan were tested in a strategic war game involving the senior command of the armed forces" (191).

Strictly speaking, there is more than enough information to ponder. Historians have at their disposal five versions of the general plan for the strategic deployment of the Red Army, as well as materials on the operational plans of the two most important fronts: the Southwestern and Western Fronts. The content of the Soviet command's operational-strategic plans has already been analyzed in detail in the works of P. Bobylev, V. Danilov, V. Kiselev, M. Meltyukhov, B. Petrov, and other Russian historians. For the purposes of this book, it suffices to note just three key points.

First, an operational plan for a major war in the West did exist (“An operational plan for the war against Germany existed, and it was not only worked out by the General Staff but also detailed by the commanders of the troops and the staffs of the Soviet Union’s western border military districts.”—A.M. Vasilevsky). It is strange that this needs to be specifically proven, but some communist propagandists, in their “zeal without reason,” went so far as to claim that the naive and gullible Stalin replaced the development of combat plans with a fond scrutiny of Ribbentrop’s signature on the infamous “Non-Aggression Pact.”

Second, all the operational plans known to us are in fact the same document, varying only slightly from one version to another. There is not only a semantic but also a clear textual overlap among all versions of the Grand Plan.

Third, without exception, all versions constitute a plan for an offensive operation conducted beyond the state borders of the USSR, with Germany invariably identified as the main adversary. Military operations on Soviet territory were not even considered as one of the possible scenarios for the course of the war. All the place names in the theater of the anticipated military operations are those of Polish and East Prussian cities and rivers.

To illustrate this point, we will cite excerpts from two documents (for ease of comparison, the author has highlighted certain keywords).

Thus, the May (1941) “Considerations on the Strategic Deployment Plan”:

“...The primary strategic objective of the Red Army’s operations is to crush the main forces of the German army deployed south of the Brest–Dęblin line and, by the 30th day of the operation, to advance to the Ostrołęka front, the Narva River, Iwicz, Łódź, Opole, and Olomouc...

...The immediate task is to crush the German army east of the Vistula River and in the Kraków sector, advance to the Vistula River, and capture the Katowice area. To this end: the main strike by the forces of the Southwestern Front is to be delivered in the direction of Kraków and Katowice...

...a supporting strike is to be launched by the left wing of the Western Front... with the aim of pinning down the Warsaw group and assisting the Southwestern Front in defeating the enemy’s Lublin group...

...Composition and objectives of the fronts being deployed in the West: Southwestern Front—using a concentric strike by the armies of the front’s right wing, encircle and destroy the enemy’s main group east of the Vistula River in the Lublin area;

simultaneously, through an attack from the Senyava, Przemysl, and Lutowiska fronts, to break up enemy forces in the Krakow and Sandomierz-Kielce directions and capture the Krakow, Katowice, and Kielce areas...”

Here is another (earlier) document: “Memorandum from the Chief of Staff of the Kiev Military District Regarding the Decision of the Military Council of the Southwestern Front on the Deployment Plan for 1940” (16, pp. 484–498). As a side note, the term “Southwestern Front” was already in use as early as December 1940!

“...The objectives of the Southwestern Front:

The immediate strategic objective is to crush, in coordination with the left wing of the Western Front, the German armed forces in the areas of Lublin, Kielce, Radom, and Kraków, and to advance by the 30th day of the operation to the line of the Pilica River, Petrokow, Opole, and Neustadt...

The immediate objective is—in coordination with the 4th Army of the Western Front—to encircle and destroy the enemy east of the Vistula River and, on the 10th day of the operation, to reach the Vistula River and advance in the directions of Kielce and Kraków.

On the right, the Western Front (headquarters in Baranovichi) is tasked with—through a strike by the 4th Army on its left flank in the direction of Drogichin, Siedlce, and Dęblin—assisting the Southwestern Front in crushing the enemy's Lublin group...'

Anyone who takes the trouble to locate all the aforementioned cities on a map of Poland can see that the objectives set forth in these documents are entirely consistent in terms of goals, timelines, and lines of advance (see Map No. 3). By all accounts, both of these documents were drafted in close coordination and based on certain common initial directives.

Thus, the offensive against Lublin was planned at least six months before the fateful day of June 22, 1941. Moreover, the December 1940 document called for the deployment of a special "cavalry-mechanized army" in the Lviv–Yavoriv–Nesterov area, which was to advance northward and, together with the 5th Army, capture Lublin "by the end of the third day of the operation." Here, too, we see a coincidence—both in form and content—with the objectives set forth on the evening of June 22 by Directive No. 3.

Moreover (and this is very important to note), Directive No. 3 was a cautious, moderate, and restrained document compared to the prewar plans of the Southwestern Front. Thus, according to the December plan, the offensive on Lublin was only one of the strikes to be carried out by the troops of the Southwestern Front. Moreover, out of the front's total of 11 tank divisions and 13 tank brigades, only 6 divisions and 3 brigades were planned to be deployed for the offensive on Lublin at that time. The other armies of the Southwestern Front were assigned tasks of no less significance in December 1940. On the 10th–12th day of the offensive, the troops of the 6th, 26th, and 12th Armies were to reach the line formed by the Vistula and Dunajec rivers (with an offensive depth of 120–130 km) and capture the crossings over these rivers near Sandomierz and Tarnow.

"So what?" a skeptical reader might object. "None of this proves anything." And they would be absolutely right. In any headquarters—and all the more so in the General Staff of the vast, heavily armed Soviet Union—a multitude of different plans are drawn up. Most of them are subsequently destroyed in accordance with established procedure, with the signature of a representative of the counterintelligence service. So, perhaps Comrade Stalin rejected the aforementioned plans of the military command as contrary to the "consistently peaceful foreign policy of the USSR" and ordered the digging of trenches and the strengthening of defenses?

No. This is a mistaken assumption that does not correspond to historical truth. The plans for a large-scale Red Army offensive from the "Lviv salient" into southern Poland were approved and put into action. This is confirmed not by documents (which can be forged), nor by memoirs (which are sometimes written by unscrupulous people "on commission"), but by the ACTUAL DEPLOYMENT of troops carried out in the spring and summer of 1941.

In accordance with prewar plans, four fronts were to be deployed along the western borders of the USSR: the Northern, Northwestern, Western, and Southwestern Fronts. The boundaries between the first three fronts were simply lines drawn in colored pencil on a top-secret map hidden in a specially guarded safe. The Southwestern Front (S-3.F.), however, had very tangible, natural boundaries.

The northern flank of the S-3 Front was impenetrably shielded by a belt of Pripyat Marshes, which stretches strictly from west to east, from Brest to Mozyr, 400 km deep into the territory of the USSR. Polessye is a swampy forest, crisscrossed by hundreds of small streams, that was completely impassable for the military vehicles of that era. It is said that there were villages there where, during three years of occupation, not a single German soldier was ever seen.

The southern flank of the front was anchored by the Danube Delta (an equally impassable network of large and small waterways) and the shores of the Black Sea. Thus, the territory of the 3rd Southern Front was, in effect, an isolated theater of operations with no operational link to its neighbors (hereinafter referred to as the “southern theater of operations”),

According to the December 1940 plan, seven armies—comprising 76 infantry and 7 cavalry divisions—were to be deployed in this theater of operations.

In the May 1941 “Considerations on the Strategic Deployment Plan,” it was planned to deploy eight armies on the Southern Front No. 3, comprising 74 infantry and 5 cavalry divisions.

In fact, by the end of June 1941, eight armies had been deployed in the southern theater of operations. Six armies were in the first echelon near the border (from north to south): the 5th Army, 6th Army, 26th Army, 12th Army, 18th Army, and 9th Army. Two more armies were being unloaded deep in the operational rear of the front: the 16th Army in the Shepetivka area and the 19th Army in the Cherkasy–Bila Tserkva area. In total, 61 infantry divisions (thirty-two as part of the 3rd Southern Front, thirteen as part of the Southern Front, and sixteen as part of the 19th and 16th Armies) and 5 cavalry divisions were deployed in the southern theater of operations.

Now let us turn to an assessment of the strength of the Red Army’s main striking force—the tank and motorized divisions. According to the December plan, the 3rd Southern Front was to deploy 10 tank divisions and 13 tank brigades, as well as 5 motorized divisions and 6 motorized brigades. A direct and unambiguous comparison of the December (1940) and May (1941) plans in this regard is impossible—in February 1941, the structure of the tank forces was radically altered, the brigades were disbanded, and nearly all divisions were incorporated into 29 mechanized corps. But one thing is certain—the planned concentration of mechanized forces in the southern theater of operations had grown significantly and, according to the “Considerations” of May 15, 1941, was to include 28 tank and 15 motorized divisions (out of a total of 40 tank and 20 motorized divisions stationed in the European part of the USSR). Thus, the southern direction (toward Kraków–Katowice) clearly became the main thrust.

In fact, by the start of hostilities, eleven mechanized corps had been deployed in the southern theater of operations. Here are their numbers:

— the 22nd, 4th, 15th, 8th, 16th, and 18th in the first echelon of the armies; — the 9th, 19th, and 24th in the reserve of the Southern Front Command; and — the 5th as part of the 16th Army.

This massive force comprised 22 tank and 11 motorized divisions; in addition, along with the 16th Army, the 57th Independent Tank Division also arrived (from Mongolia) in the Shepetivka–Slavuta

area. Total: 23 tank and 11 motorized divisions. What a pity that none of this information was reported to Hitler at the time! Perhaps he would have shot himself four years earlier...

Let’s take stock of the situation so far. The actual deployment of Red Army forces in the southern theater of operations was very close to what had been outlined in prewar plans. Such a deployment of troops—with a clear concentration of forces in a single direction—could not have come about by chance, “on its own.” Undoubtedly, there was a certain Plan according to which this multi-million-strong army was deployed. The obvious incompleteness of the troop concentration (the actual number of infantry and tank divisions was 15–20% less than planned) has the simplest explanation: the strategic deployment of the Red Army was carried out according to a schedule drawn up before the German invasion was anticipated. “The transfer of troops was planned with the expectation that the concentration would be completed in the areas designated by operational plans between June 1 and July 10, 1941.” For this single sentence alone, the authors of the collective monograph *1941: Lessons and Conclusions* should have been awarded the Medal “For Courage” back then, in 1992...

However, even if none of the documents mentioned above had been published, it would not be difficult at all to identify the main features of the invasion plan. It is enough to “place” the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front on a map and indicate their strength. And everything will immediately “appear,” just like in a developing tray with developer...

Thus, the following mechanized corps were deployed in the first echelon of the Southwestern Front (from north to south, from Kovel to Chernivtsi):

X X ch SV ^ X a ^ □ GN g N X “ ǀ X v n

22th Mechanized Corps Volyn-Rivne 712 31 82/70 1226 114

15th Mechanized Corps, Brod–Kremenets 749 136 160/94 2035 165

4 MK Lviv 979 414 175/89 2854 274

8 MK Drohobych–Stryi 899 171 172/87 3237 359

16 MK Stanislav–Chernivtsi 478 4 118/71 1777 193

Note: Armored cars: the first figure is the total number; the second includes BA-10s armed with a 45-mm cannon.

As can be seen, the existence of a powerful strike force consisting of three mechanized corps, centered on the 4th Mechanized Corps, is absolutely indisputable—this mechanized corps is manned with tanks at nearly 100% of its authorized strength, and in terms of the number of the latest heavy and medium tanks, it is equal to all the other mechanized corps taken together (the 9th, 19th, and 24th Mechanized Corps, which were deployed in the operational depth, had only a few new tanks each). It should be noted right away that all figures relating to the prewar strength of the Red Army’s tank formations should be considered only as approximate. There was little order in their accounting. The table above is compiled based on data from a reputable monograph (3), but in the memoirs of General Ryabyshev, former commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps, the figure given is 932 tanks; according to the Kyiv Museum of the Great Patriotic War, the 8th Mechanized Corps had 813 tanks; and in the famous, very first publicly available publication on the strength of Soviet mechanized corps (VIZH 4/1989), the

figure given was 858... The same situation applies to other corps.

Now let's move on to the main question: where was the 4th Mechanized Corps, the strike force, on the morning of June 22, 1941?

In the Lviv–Nesterov area. That is, exactly where, according to the "December Plan," the assault "Cavalry-Mechanized Army"—intended to launch an offensive on Lublin—was supposed to be deployed! 60 km southwest of Lviv, in the Drohobych–Sambir area, we find the 8th Mechanized Corps, and 100 km northeast of Lviv, in the Brody–Kremenets area, the 15th Mechanized Corps was deploying (see Map No. 4). Two days before the war began, all three divisions of the 4th Mechanized Corps began moving westward, toward the very "tip" of the Lviv salient.

In his memoirs, Ryabyshev writes that "on June 20, 1941, I received a top-secret package from Colonel General M.P. Kirponos, commander of the troops of the Kyiv Special Military District: I was personally ordered to immediately proceed to the border and conduct reconnaissance of the area of anticipated operations (emphasis mine—M.S.) of the 8th Mechanized Corps" (194, p. 8). In the context of a defensive operation, the mechanized corps' "area of anticipated operations" could in no way have been near the border posts. The task of the mechanized corps was to launch a counterstrike against the main enemy force grouping in the event of a breakthrough into the operational depth of the army's or front's defensive zone. Ryabyshev then writes without a hint of embarrassment: "Finally, the city of Przemyśl, an ancient fortress, came into view ahead. The border ran along the San River. Further on, across the river, Nazi German troops were positioned. The command reconnaissance mission lasted two days..."

It was only the German invasion, which had just begun, that diverted the commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps from reconnoitering the adjacent territory. On the morning of June 22, 1941 (at 5:40 a.m.), the command of the 8th Mechanized Corps opened the "red package," and in accordance with Order No. 002 of the commander of the 26th Army dated May 17, 1941, (!!!) the mechanized corps moved westward, reaching the San River on the border west of Sambir by the afternoon (28, p. 165). The "red package" containing Directive No. 0013 of the Kiev Military District Headquarters dated May 31, 1941, was opened by the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps at 4:45 a.m., after which the corps' divisions moved toward Radekhov (29, p. 255).

From this starting area, the tank wedge could have struck Tarnów, Sandomierz, and Lublin with equal success. The distances from the Drohobych–Lviv–Brody line to these three Polish cities are practically the same: 175–200 km.

Given the terrain, the Lublin direction is the most preferable—there will be no major rivers in the path of the advancing tank avalanche, and the route of the advance runs practically through a "corridor" between the Vepsh and San rivers.

So what was all the talk about the "haste" and "unrealistic nature" of Directive No. 3 that our propagandists had been harping on for so many years?

The only thing missing for an offensive on Lublin was an order. That order was issued on the evening of June 22, 1941.

To conclude this chapter, it remains to be noted that the offensive nature of the Soviet operational plans—and the deployment of troop formations dictated by these plans—was only proven after the

publication of V. Suvorov's famous book *The Icebreaker*. Prior to that, Soviet historians and memoirists calmly and readily acknowledged that "the disposition of positions and troops was influenced by the offensive nature of the planned strategic operations… the concept for strategic deployment and the formation of operational groupings of forces largely reflected offensive objectives…" (3). True, such admissions were always accompanied by the caveat that "due to an incorrect assessment of the situation, an unjustifiable mistake was made…." Suvorov merely dared to stop treating Soviet generals as idiots who did not understand the basics of operational art, and drew attention to the intellectual—and, most importantly, moral—virtues of Soviet historians. Of course, the "historians" did not forgive him for this. Strangely enough, even the Soviet generals whom Suvorov had rehabilitated did not stand up for him...

"OUR ARMOR IS STRONG AND OUR TANKS ARE FAST..."

Issuing an order is no difficult matter. But did the Red Army's high command take steps to ensure that the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front, operating in their offensive sector, had the threefold superiority in forces required by the principles of military science?

No. There was no threefold superiority. The balance of forces between the sides was expressed by entirely different figures.

There are different ways to calculate this. One can compare the total strength of the tank forces deployed by the Wehrmacht and the Red Army across the entire southern theater of operations. This is a reasonably sound approach. The distances in Western Ukraine are not "Siberian," but rather "European." Even from the deployment areas of the 16th, 18th, 9th, and 19th Mechanized Corps—which were the farthest from the border (i.e., from the cities of Chernivtsi, Mohyliv-Podilskyi, Novohrad-Volynskyi, and Berdychiv)—the distance to Lviv was only 250–300 km. Even traveling on dirt roads at a snail's pace of 10 km/h, such a redeployment could have been carried out in just 25–30 motor-hours. That's two or three days of steady marching. In reality, on dry June roads, with daylight lasting 18 hours, everything could have been done much faster. Finally, there were railroads. Five railroads lead to Lviv, the historic center of Galicia, along which mechanized corps could have been transported from virtually any point in Ukraine and Moldova, thereby conserving the tanks' precious engine hours.

In this scenario, against the 728 tanks in the Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group and the 60 tanks in the Romanian Army's sole tank brigade, the Soviet command could field 5,617 tanks.

This represents a SEVEN-FOLD numerical superiority. And this figure is significantly underestimated. We did not take into account the light tanks assigned to the Red Army's rifle and cavalry divisions (the Wehrmacht's infantry divisions had no tanks at all). We did not take into account the 749 BA-10 armored gun carriages, which were on par with light German tanks in terms of armament and armor protection. Finally, we did not account for nearly two thousand tanks in the 16th and 19th Armies, which were initially deployed in Right-Bank Ukraine, in the rear of the Southwestern Front.

One can look at it differently—in a way that is closer to the harsh historical reality. In fact, only six mechanized corps took part in combat operations during the first week of the war in Western Ukraine: the 22nd, 15th, 4th, 8th, 9th, and 19th Mechanized Corps. Four mechanized corps (the 16th, 18th, 24th, and 2nd) were practically inactive or were wasting fuel on pointless redeployments. It is hard to classify such a disgrace as an "objective circumstance," but that is exactly how things were. On the other hand, the Romanian tanks (more precisely, French-made tanks from World War I) did not pose a

threat to anyone or anything. With this approach (and disregarding armored cars), we arrive at a force ratio of 1 to 5.5.

So what other directive, apart from the order to launch a decisive offensive, could Tymoshenko and Zhukov have issued given such a numerical superiority?

Everything is relative. The troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front successfully carried out the Lviv-Sandomierz Offensive (July–August 1944), comprising three tank armies (the 1st, 3rd, and 4th), which were armed with 419, 490, and 464 tanks and self-propelled guns, respectively. A total of 1,373 units. Before the start of the Berlin Operation, the four tank armies (the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Guards Tank Armies) had 709, 672, 572, and 395 tanks and self-propelled guns (167), respectively. During the largest and highly successful Vistula-Oder Offensive (which saw the fastest advance and greatest depth of penetration by Soviet tank forces), the four tank armies were equipped with 3,302 tanks and self-propelled guns—a huge number, but still significantly less than the number of tanks deployed on the southern front in June 1941.

But perhaps in the summer of 1941, our tanks were inferior? Outdated, “no match whatsoever” for the enemy’s tanks?

Soviet historians, academics, and generals, in countless articles, books, and memoirs, confidently answer this question as well: our “older-model” tanks (i.e., the T-26, BT, and T-28) were not just bad—they were very bad. So bad, in fact, that for many decades, academics did not even take them into account in the overall balance of power between the sides. Just look at all the people who contributed their pens and hands to this campaign of disinformation against their own people! Even “Marshal of Victory” Zhukov himself, in his classic “Memoirs and Reflections,” laments the wretchedness of Soviet tanks:

“...They were not very maneuverable and were easily vulnerable to artillery fire... they ran on gasoline and were therefore highly flammable... their armor was not strong enough...” (15).

Here we have a small literary masterpiece. It is impossible to accuse Zhukov of deception. Everything he said, down to the last letter, is true. Any tank is “vulnerable” (compared, for example, to a reinforced concrete bunker) and “lacks maneuverability” (compared to a helicopter). It depends on what you compare them to. The wise Zhukov refrained from comparing Soviet tanks to the German tanks of their time. He does not say at all that German tanks were “highly maneuverable and invulnerable,” or that their engines ran on something other than “highly flammable gasoline.” But there is no doubt that out of a thousand people who read the great commander’s memoirs, 999 understood this paragraph to mean precisely that our tanks were “junk” and “coffins,” while the German ones were much better. Well, that’s the work of a master! And General Vladimirsky, a distinguished war veteran, writes simply and without embellishment in his academically sound book (92): “By the start of the attack on the USSR, Germany undoubtedly had a qualitative advantage over our tanks.”

There you have it—“undoubtedly had.”

But the question is: who had the upper hand? Did Germany have a qualitative advantage in tanks, or did Party propaganda have a stranglehold on our minds for so many years?

Let’s start with the basics: definitions. What does the phrase “German tanks were better than ours” actually mean? Which German tanks were better than which Soviet ones? Is the five-metric-ton Rh-1

tankette with two machine guns better than the heavy KV with a three-inch gun? I don't think even the most zealous propaganda propagandists would say that. Or are we talking about the fact that the best German tank, the Rh-Sh, was superior to our T-27 light tank, which was taken out of production in 1934? That's true, but why compare them at all?

In the author's opinion, a proper analysis of the quality of the Soviet and German tank fleets is possible only if at least two conditions are met:

— the tanks being compared must serve the same functional purpose and belong to the same "class";

— the number of tanks in each class relative to the total tank fleet must be taken into account.

Guided by these quite obvious requirements, let us proceed to a comparative analysis of the equipment of the opposing tank formations.

The Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group—the only one on the southern theater of operations, consisting of the 13th, 14th I, 16th, and 9th Tank Divisions—had 728 tanks in its arsenal.

Based on their tactical and technical characteristics and functional purpose, they can be roughly divided into FOUR classes:

— light tanks;

— high-quality light tanks;

— fire support tanks;

— good medium tanks.

We will classify 8 Rg-1 units, 211 Rg-II units, and 54 so-called "commander's tanks"—a total of 273 tanks (which accounts for 38% of the total strength of the 1st Tank Group)—as "light tanks."

Here is how G. Guderian, the chief ideologist and creator of Germany's armored forces, describes the history of the development of these "formidable fighting machines":

<■?...we considered it necessary, for the time being, to create tanks that could be used for training purposes... this type of tank allowed only for the installation of machine guns in a rotating turret. Such tanks, designated the Rg-1, could be manufactured by 1934 and used as training vehicles until combat tanks were ready... Of course, no one thought in 1932 that we would have to go into battle with these small training tanks..."

However, the Rg-1 did have some quite tangible advantages. Here is how Guderian describes the advantages his first tanks had over the plywood-and-cardboard models previously used in Reichswehr exercises:

"...schoolchildren, who had previously poked holes in our models with their pencils to look inside, were amazed by the new armored vehicles..." (65).

That's how it was. The fascists didn't know that what awaited them ahead wasn't a schoolboy with a

pencil, but Red Army soldier Sereda with an axe.

“The brave soldier crept up from the rear along a ditch, quickly scrambled onto the tank, and with blows from his sapper’s axe put the machine gun and the crew of the enemy tank out of action.” This is not a front-page article from the newspaper *Pravda*. These are lines from the memoirs of Army General D.D. Lelyushenko (22), a celebrated commander of the Great Patriotic War who ended the war in Prague as commander of the 4th Guards Tank Army; he did not see German tanks only in pictures. And Komsomol member Ivan Pavlovich Sereda is not a fictional character, but a real participant in the war, honored for his feat with the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and a monument in his hometown, the village of Galitsinovka.

Let us continue, however, with the reading of Guderian’s memoirs:

“...since the production of the main tank types had taken longer than we had anticipated, General Lutz decided to build another interim tank type, armed with a 20-mm automatic cannon and a single machine gun...”

What can these German tankettes be compared to? Since the Red Army had nothing worse in its arsenal than the obsolete T-26 tank—which had already been taken out of production by the start of the war—we will compare it to the German Rg-P (here and below, we use materials published in 1, 3, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 100, 101, 102, and 167).

By and large, both are, as they say, “equal in every respect.” Underpowered engines, short range, and anti-bullet armor—these were typical characteristics of light tanks from the early 1930s.

Although the thickness of the Rg-P’s frontal armor was twice that of the T-26, this did not turn it into a tank with anti-shell armor. This fact is clearly illustrated by the figure in the last column of the table.

The 45-mm 20K gun mounted on the T-26 could reliably penetrate such armor at a range of 1,200 m, whereas a shell from the German 20-mm Kluk 30 gun retained the necessary velocity and armor-penetrating capability only at ranges of 300–500 m. This combination of armament and armor protection allowed the Soviet tank, when used tactically, to destroy the Rh II with virtually impunity.

At least, this is how General Pavlov described the practical experience of fighting German tanks in his report at the December (1940) Conference of Senior Commanders:

“...the experience of the Spanish Civil War taught the Germans and showed them what kind of tanks they needed, for the light German tanks were no match at all against the Republican gun tanks (i.e., our T-26s and later the BT-5s) and were mercilessly destroyed...” (14).

It is also worth noting that, in terms of ballistic characteristics, the “gun” of the German Rch-P is slightly inferior to the Soviet 14.5-mm Dyagterev anti-tank rifle. Thus, the most accurate designation for the Rh-P would be “self-propelled anti-tank rifle with a machine gun.” This combat vehicle could be (and in fact was) successfully used for reconnaissance and to engage enemy light tanks and armored vehicles. However, for the tank’s primary tasks—destroy the enemy’s firepower and manpower—the 20-mm cannon mounted on the RKh-P was completely unsuitable, so classifying the RKh-P as a “tank” is a gross exaggeration.

Now all that remains is to assess the numbers. As of June 1, 1941, there were 1,962 tanks in the

Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group of the Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group, as of June 1, 1941, the Kiev Military District (excluding the Odessa Military District) alone had 1,962 T-26 tanks on its roster (here and below, the number of tanks in the Kiev Military District is cited from a report by the head of the Motorized Armored Vehicles Directorate, Yu-3. f. by Major General Morgunov dated July 17, 1941) (29, p. 103). The numerical ratio in this tank class was 1 to 9.

In addition, the district had another 651 amphibious tanks of the T-37, T-38, and T-40 types. Sometimes, in military history literature, they are lumped together with the German Rg-1. In our view, such a comparison is completely inappropriate. The lack of artillery armament on a reconnaissance tracked amphibious vehicle is understandable and justified. There is no need to fire a cannon during reconnaissance, but the ability to cross rivers and lakes "without knowing the ford" made the T-37/38 a unique combat vehicle. No one ever planned to use the T-37/T-38 as a front-line tank, and these amphibious vehicles were, as a rule, in service with the reconnaissance units of infantry and tank divisions.

Now let's move on to the second category: "good light tanks."

In the Wehrmacht's tank units, the Rg-Sch series B, E, and E tanks, armed with a 37-mm gun, undoubtedly deserved this designation. The 1st Tank Group had exactly 100 of these tanks.

Developed in 1936 by Daimler-Benz, this combat vehicle was indeed excellent. The amenities designed by the engineers for the crew's comfort could be considered a model to emulate. No Soviet, British, or American tank of that era possessed them. The five-man crew included a commander who was "relieved" of gunner duties and had at his disposal a special commander's turret equipped with optical devices providing a 360-degree view. And yet, driving comfort was not the tank's main advantage. As was so aptly put in a beloved folk song ("The armor is strong, and our tanks are fast, and the enemy knows the power of their fire…"), a tank is all about armor, mobility, and armament. In two of these areas, our fine light tank, the BT-7, outperformed the "Trio."

Rg-Sh E 19.5

BT-7 13.8

300 30/30 40

450 22/10 52/72

165

230/500

37

45

Despite its thicker armor, the German tank was inferior to its opponent in terms of the ratio of armament to armor protection. Our BT could engage the Rh-Sh at a range of one kilometer while remaining relatively safe. Just as with the RG-P, the choice of 30-mm frontal armor on the RG-Sh was an unquestionable mistake: it was too thin to provide protection against shells, and far too thick to be

necessary against small-arms fire from enemy infantry.

Well, by all measures of mobility, the wheeled-tracked BT-7 was simply the best tank in the world. Even on tracks, it reached a speed of 52 km/h—incredible for tanks of that era—and had a range on a single tank of fuel one and a half times greater than that of the Rh-Sh. Even off-road, the BT traveled at a speed of 35 km/h—that is, nearly 10 meters per second—which was unmatched by any tank of that era. But even that was not the limit. In 1940, the BT-7M went into mass production. This tank was equipped with a 500-l.s. diesel engine. In addition to the well-known advantages of a diesel tank (diesel fuel doesn't explode, and it's not that easy to ignite), the installation of a more powerful and fuel-efficient engine allowed the maximum speed on tracks to reach 62 km/h, and the range—up to 400 km! With its tracks removed, the BT-7M could reach speeds of up to 86 km/h on a good road, and its range on wheels was a staggering 900 km.

As of June 1, 1941, there were 201 such tanks (BT-7M) in the Kiev Military District's forces out of a total of 1,486 BT-7 tanks. Another 169 BT-7M tanks were part of the neighboring Odessa Military District, and, given this tank's mobility, a rapid redeployment over 470 km from Chisinau to Lviv could not be considered impossible.

Thus, in the category of "good light tanks," Soviet forces in the southern theater of operations possessed a huge numerical advantage, along with some qualitative superiority.

Now let's turn to what we have called "fire support tanks."

As we noted above, for a tank formation, combat against other tanks is neither the only nor even the most important type of combat operation, but rather a "necessary evil." Accordingly, in tank design practice, attempts were made to separate the two main tasks of a tank (combating enemy tanks and providing fire support for friendly infantry) and to create specialized tank destroyers and fire support tanks—just as in aviation of that era there was a clear distinction between bomber aircraft (whose mission is to destroy enemy ground forces) and fighter aircraft (whose mission is to destroy enemy aircraft).

For example, based on the T-34 tank, it was planned (Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR No. 1216–506/ss of May 5, 1941) to develop a tank destroyer armed with a long-barreled 57-mm gun capable of penetrating 80 mm of armor at a range of 1 km. Mass production of this "hunter" was quickly halted, as it became clear during combat operations that the Wehrmacht simply did not have tanks with such armor (though several dozen T-34/57s did take part in the Battle of Moscow).

"Fire support tanks," on the other hand, were mass-produced for a long time in both the Soviet Union and Germany. A distinctive feature of this class of tanks was their short-barreled 3-inch guns. The muzzle velocity of the projectile—and, consequently, the armor-penetration capability of these guns—was very low (the Soviet 45-mm 20K tank gun outperformed the German 75-mm K^K-37 gun in armor penetration at all ranges!), but enemy infantry were hit by a "full-weight" 3-inch high-explosive fragmentation shell.

The Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group included 100 Rg-1U fire support tanks—twenty tanks in each division. Meanwhile, the troops of the Kiev Military District were armed with 195 three-turret T-28 tanks and 48 five-turret T-35 giants. A total of 243 tanks.

Despite having the same functional purpose, these were very different combat vehicles in appearance.

The Soviet three-turret T-28 tank was significantly heavier and a full 1.5 meters longer. All of this made it quite unwieldy on the battlefield compared to the German RG-1U. At the same time, for fighting enemy infantry, our T-28 (thanks to its two separate machine-gun turrets) was much better armed. In addition, some of the later-production T-28s were equipped with a long-barreled 76-mm gun, which "elevated" it to the category of full-fledged medium tanks.

The situation with armor protection is not so straightforward either. At first glance, the German RG-1U appears to have much thicker armor. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the "four" models of the A, B, C, O, and E series, produced from 1938 through early 1941, had typical bulletproof armor: 30 mm at the front and 20 mm on the sides. Later, the hull's frontal armor was reinforced with a 30-mm armor plate (the "Four's" turret still had only bulletproof armor!). But even our T-28s, following the bloody lessons of the Finnish War, were fitted with additional frontal armor (up to 60 or even 80 mm) and were in no way inferior to the R-1U in this regard.

The wide tracks of the Soviet tank also provided it with better cross-country mobility. The ground pressure of the 28-metric-ton T-28 was significantly lower (0.72 vs. 1.03 kg/cm^2) than that of the lighter German Rg-1U.

Overall, in terms of their combined tactical and technical characteristics, these tanks were roughly equivalent. Yet Soviet historians stubbornly referred to the Rkh-TU as a "heavy tank," while simply ignoring the fact that the Red Army had hundreds of T-28 tanks in service. And they were wrong to do so. In skilled hands, it was a very "noticeable" combat vehicle indeed. In October 1941, Army General D.D. Lelyushenko assumed command of the 5th Army, which had engaged German tank divisions on the legendary Borodino Field near Moscow. In his memoirs, he recalls the following as a stroke of good luck:

"...I sent Major A. Efimov out on a reconnaissance mission. An hour and a half later, he joyfully reported that there were 16 T-28 tanks without engines but with serviceable guns... For us, this was a real stroke of luck. Of course, we had to use these tanks as stationary firing positions, bury them in the ground, and position them along the Borodino–Mozhaisk axis, where the enemy would launch its main tank assault..."

The decision proved to be the right one. Lelyushenko writes:

"...Sergeant Serebryakov is already shooting down the fourth tank point-blank from a T-28... The enemy attempted to advance into the Mozhaisk area but was met with direct fire from our dug-in T-28 tanks. Having lost a great deal of equipment, the enemy halted for a short time..." (22).

So that was our story: 16 T-28 tank hulls without engines were "a real find," while the 292 serviceable T-28 tanks (with engines, of course) in service with the Red Army in the summer of 1941 were "a trifle" not even worth mentioning...

Is it any wonder, then, that our "historians" did not even mention the 48 five-turret T-35s in service with the 67th and 68th Tank Regiments of the 34th Tank Division, 8th Mechanized Corps, of the Southwestern Front? Is it really so insignificant—half a hundred steel giants whose combined number of tank guns (48 three-inch guns and 96 45-mm 20K gun barrels) surpassed that of any of the tank divisions in the Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group! There's no denying that, by all measures of mobility, this "land battleship" was inferior to any motorcycle (later on, we'll see how the Southwestern Front

command drove the 8th Mechanized Corps—including its heavy tanks—in zigzags for hundreds of kilometers). But is it really the heavy tank's fault that they tried to use it THAT way? After all, even if they were simply buried in the ground, 48 five-turret tanks could have formed a defensive strongpoint in a matter of hours—one that would have been virtually impregnable to enemy infantry and light tanks.

And finally, the very best equipment in service with the Wehrmacht's tank divisions in the summer of 1941: the excellent medium tanks of the Rg-Sh N and 3 series.

"The very best" is not the opinion of an amateur author, but the conclusion of an authoritative state commission (composed of 48 people—engineers, intelligence officers, and designers—which, under the leadership of People's Commissar Tevo-syan, traveled three times in 1939–1940, scoured, and—pardon the expression—sniffed out German tank factories, and from everything they saw, selected only the Rg-Sh tank for purchase. And this was not because Comrade Stalin was stingy with money. Stalin spared no expense for a good cause—the purchase or theft of Western military technology. In Germany itself, under the cover of a friendship treaty, the following were purchased: five "Messerschmitt-109s," six "Messerschmitt Po"s, two "Junkers 88"s, two "Dornier 215"s, one of the latest experimental "Messerschmitt 209"s (the Germans probably simply didn't have a second one; otherwise, they would have taken that one too), a battery of 105-mm anti-aircraft guns, heavy 210-mm howitzers, blueprints for the newest and largest battleship in the world, the "Bismarck," special 88-mm submarine guns that do not rust in seawater, six periscopes, hydroacoustic equipment, optical rangefinders for naval artillery, 330-mm naval gun mounts, tank radio sets, sights for dive-bombing, 4 sets of instruments for ballistic testing of artillery systems, etc., etc.

And only a single tank of a single type. All other models of German tanks, which supposedly "undoubtedly had qualitative superiority over our tanks," simply did not interest the Soviet reconnaissance engineers.

The Rg-Sh of the Ni series became the "best" thanks to two factors: the new 50-mm Kluk-38 gun and 50-mm-thick frontal hull armor. Initially, the N series also went into production with the 30-mm frontal armor typical of German tanks, but later an additional 30-mm plate was welded onto the front, thus bringing the tank's armor protection to 60 mm at the point where this "patch" was applied. This means that the RG-Sh, armored in this way, became a tank with anti-shell armor: even if our 45-mm anti-tank (tank) gun could penetrate such armor, it could only do so at an extremely short range of 100 m, which is not always possible in combat and is always deadly dangerous.

However, let's not forget that a tank on the battlefield is not a tram on rails. When moving across rough terrain, it was difficult for the "Troika" not to expose its towering hull and turret to enemy fire; these were protected by 30-mm armor, which (let's repeat this once more) all of our light tanks and even gun-armed armored cars could penetrate with a 45-mm shell from a range of one kilometer. So the claim that the Rg-Sch series Ni had effective anti-shell armor is rather far-fetched.

There cannot be many of the very best. By definition. As mentioned above, the Wehrmacht's 3rd Tank Group had no tanks of this type at all. In Western Ukraine, as part of the 1st Tank Group, there may have been 255 Rg-Sh tanks of the Ni series. This vague phrasing—"may have been"—stems from the fact that the sources available to the author specify only the number of "threes" armed with the new 50-mm gun. There were 255 such tanks in the 1st Tank Group. However, early-series Rg-Sh tanks (E, R, S) with 20–30-mm anti-projectile armor were also retrofitted with this gun. Therefore, if we assume that all 255 Rh-Sh tanks with the 50-mm gun had frontal armor capable of withstanding shell

fragments, we are significantly overestimating the quality of the German tank divisions operating on the southern theater of operations.

In the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front, 496 T-34 tanks should be classified as good medium tanks. Another 50 T-34s were in the 2nd Mechanized Corps of the Southern Front near Chisinau. As can be seen, even the Red Army had only a few of the very best tanks. Only twice as many as the Germans. But even that is a great many, considering their absolute superiority in tactical and technical characteristics.

By virtually all key metrics—mobility, armor protection, and armament—the T-34 outperformed the best German tank as of June 1941, the Pz.KpF-3 series.

The T-34's long-barreled 76-mm gun could penetrate the frontal armor of the best German tanks (the Pz.KpF-3 and Pz.KpF-1U) at ranges of 1,000–1,200 meters. Meanwhile, NOT A SINGLE Wehrmacht tank could hit the "thirty-four" even from 500 meters. Only when firing at extremely close ranges (100–300 meters) could the German Kauk-38 50-mm tank gun theoretically penetrate the T-34's side armor.

Thanks to its wide (550 mm) tracks, the T-34—even though it weighed 6–7 metric tons more than the heaviest German tanks—exerted a ground pressure of only 0.72 kg/cm² (compared to 0.9–1.0 kg/cm² for the German PzKp.G-III). This resulted in superior off-road mobility over rough terrain, mud, and snow.

And finally, the T-34's main "secret": a compact and very powerful diesel engine (Germany began and ended the war with "flammable" tanks powered by gasoline engines). But a diesel engine isn't just about relative fire safety. It also offers low fuel consumption, allowing the T-34 to travel more than 300 kilometers on a single tank of fuel—a distance equivalent to that from Lviv to Radom or Kraków. And on top of all this, this very heavy (by German standards) vehicle could reach a higher speed than even the lightest and fastest German Rh-P.

All these arguments are by no means abstract theorizing. In the memoirs of German "practitioners" (Generals Guderian, Blumentritt, Gota, and Schneider), it is not difficult to find numerous accounts of the shock the Wehrmacht experienced upon encountering the new Soviet tank:

"...in 1941, these tanks were the most powerful of all that existed... T-34 tanks cut right through the battle formations of the 7th Infantry Division as if nothing were there, reached the artillery positions, and literally crushed the guns stationed there... our anti-tank guns proved powerless against the Russian T-34 tanks... it came to the point of panic..."

These are memoirs—fiction, so to speak. But here is a serious document: "Instructions for All Units of the Eastern Front on How Our Tanks Should Combat the Russian T-34." Issued on May 26, 1942, by the Wehrmacht's Mobile Forces Command (8. S.B.E.P. T.G.R.E.P.). Here's how the command "cheered up" its soldiers:

"...The T-34 is faster, more maneuverable, and has better off-road mobility than our R-P1 and R-1U tanks. Its armor is stronger. The penetration capability of its 7.62-cm gun surpasses that of our 5-cm and 7.5-cm guns. The effective arrangement of the sloped armor plates increases the likelihood of ricochet... Engaging the T-34 with our 5th-caliber K^K 38 gun is only possible at close range by firing at the tank's flank or rear... it is necessary to fire so that the shell strikes the armor surface

perpendicularly...” (87).

Excellent instructions. Absolutely precise and accurate. Alas, these instructions (contrary to the much-praised German punctuality) contain no guidance on how to actually position the gun barrel of a German tank in such a manner. If there’s no heavy cargo helicopter at hand, there’s only one way left: climb a steep hill (with a slope of at least 40 degrees) and ask the crew of a Soviet tank to drive closer and turn its rear toward you...

Only the crew of a German Rh-Sch had a real chance against the T-34, as its ammunition load included special sub-caliber armor-piercing shells. Such a shell had a fairly complex design, consisting of an armor-piercing core and a casing (the so-called “cavity”). When the shell struck the target, the liner—made of mild steel—would deform, while the hard, pointed core, made of tungsten carbide, would penetrate the armor. The sub-caliber shell weighed significantly less (compared to a conventional armor-piercing shell) and, as a result, had a substantially higher muzzle velocity and armor penetration. For example, the 50-mm KhU K 38 tank gun could penetrate 96 mm of armor with the RKhOg-40 sub-caliber projectile at a range of 100 meters, and 58 mm at a range of 500 meters. Even the meager 20-mm gun of the German Rh-P light tank could penetrate 49 mm of armor with a sub-caliber projectile from a distance of 100 m.

However, “even the Sun has its spots.” Just as the T-34 tank was not a “wonder weapon,” the sub-caliber projectile did not solve all the problems of anti-tank defense, and it was by no means a coincidence that it was removed from service by the end of the war.

The first and most significant drawback of sub-caliber shells was their scarcity. Tungsten carbide is an expensive and rare material, and during a protracted war, Germany could not afford to squander (in the truest sense of the word) the most scarce alloying element (tungsten), which was essential for the production of special steels. Production of “tungsten” shells amounted to tens, then just a few percent of total anti-tank ammunition production, and by early 1944, it had ceased entirely.

Second, the velocity—and consequently the armor-penetration capability—of low-weight, small-caliber shells decreases rapidly with distance. In aerodynamics, this is known as the “cube-square law” (aerodynamic drag depends on the square of the linear dimensions, while inertial force depends on the cube; therefore, a light, small-caliber projectile loses its initial velocity faster than a heavy, larger-caliber projectile). In the case of sub-caliber projectiles, the effect of this law was significantly exacerbated by the high aerodynamic drag of the “base.” In fact, firing sub-caliber projectiles was effective only at short and medium ranges (no more than 500 meters); at a distance of 1,000 meters, armor penetration dropped to practically zero.

Third, a tank is not a balloon that can simply be pierced with a needle. In combat against a tank, what matters is not the mere fact of creating a through-hole in the armor, but what is known as “behind-the-armor effect.” Standard, “conventional” armor-piercing shells contained a high-explosive charge (120–155 g of explosive in the BR-350 shell for the Soviet 76-mm tank gun), which used shrapnel and a blast wave to strike the tank crew and ignite gasoline vapors. A sub-caliber projectile, however, could not in principle carry a high-explosive charge, and the mass of the tungsten carbide core was relatively too small to generate a powerful jet of red-hot micro-fragments from the penetrated armor. It could inflict serious damage on a tank only in the event of a direct hit on a particularly vulnerable component.

In addition to these general shortcomings (which could be called “characteristics”) of sub-caliber projectiles when firing at a T-34 tank, there was one more: the tendency—characteristic of all small-

diameter, high-aspect-ratio pointed projectiles—to ricochet or “tilt over,” followed by the projectile’s destruction upon striking armor at angles greater than 30–40 degrees. The steep angle of the T-34’s hull armor plates (40 degrees on the sides, 60 degrees on the front plate) made the T-34 the most “unsuitable” target for sub-caliber projectiles. Finally, by definition, there could be no gasoline vapors in a tank with a diesel engine, so setting the “thirty-four” on fire with a projectile lacking a high-explosive charge was particularly difficult.

Having developed a tank with such phenomenal (for the early 1940s) characteristics as those possessed by the new Soviet medium tank, the T-34, it would have been easy to become “dizzy with success.” But it was not for nothing that Comrade Stalin warned the graduates of his military academies as early as May 5, 1941: “...states perish if they turn a blind eye to shortcomings, become carried away by their successes, and rest on their laurels...” (6, p. 650).

Therefore, far from resting on its laurels after launching mass production of the T-34, on that very same day, December 19, 1939, by the same Decree No. 443/ss, the KV heavy tank was adopted for service with the Red Army.

While the T-34 could still be compared—albeit with a great deal of a stretch—to the best German tank at the start of the Soviet-German War, the Pz. III Ausf. 3, the monstrous 48-metric-ton KV was simply incomparable to any German tank. With 95 mm of frontal armor and 75 mm of side armor, it was invulnerable to any German tank gun. The turbocharged V-2k diesel engine produced 600 l.s., allowing the steel giant to travel on highways at a speed only slightly slower than that of light German tanks (35 km/h). The same 76-mm Grabin F-34 gun, as found on the T-34, was capable in the summer of 1941 of shooting down any German tank—at any range, from any angle—as if it were a training target. Incredibly, even in terms of cross-country mobility, the heavy Soviet tank (with a ground pressure of just 0.77 kg/cm²) outperformed its opponents.

One-third of all KV tanks produced by early July 1941 (213 out of 636) were armed with a 152-mm howitzer (this variant was called the KV-2). It is noteworthy that, according to F. Halder’s war diary, German generals did not even believe that a tank with such armament could exist. German soldiers, however, quickly dispelled any doubts they might have had. “When our tanks appeared, especially the KVs, the infantry fled, and even the tanks refused to engage in battle... the KV tanks threw the enemy into confusion, and in every instance, their tanks retreated”—these lines are taken from a combat report of the 10th Tank Division of the 15th Mechanized Corps in June 1941.

Of course, the KV tank also had its shortcomings—and very serious ones at that. The main problem with the 48-metric-ton giant was its weak and unreliable transmission. It was only after the KV-1S variant—featuring a new transmission and a weight reduced to 42.5 metric tons—entered mass production in late 1942 that this tank found a “second wind.”

“So that’s why the Germans made it all the way to Moscow!” an astute reader might exclaim. “The KV’s transmission was terrible!” Let’s not jump to conclusions. After all, tank units have commanders in addition to tanks, so that each vehicle is used with its strengths and weaknesses in mind. Of course, a heavy tank could not withstand the kind of “circuit races” that the Southwestern Front command organized for its mechanized corps (we’ll discuss this in more detail later). However, wherever the KV was used wisely and for its intended purpose, it demonstrated its immense combat capabilities. Much has been written about the KV’s phenomenal achievements. Here, however, we will limit ourselves to mentioning just two episodes from its glorious combat history.

General Reinhardt, former commander of the Wehrmacht's 41st Tank Corps, writes:

"...we fired at the Russians' iron monsters from three sides, but it was all in vain. The Russians, on the other hand, were firing effectively. After a long battle, we were forced to retreat to avoid total defeat. The Russian giants were getting closer and closer. One of them approached our tank, which was hopelessly stuck in a marshy pond (a light German tank got stuck, while a heavy KV approached! — M.S.). Without the slightest hesitation, the black monster rolled over the tank and crushed it into the mud with its tracks. At that moment, a 150-mm howitzer arrived... The artillerymen opened direct-fire on the tank and scored a hit—it was like a bolt of lightning. The tank came to a stop... Suddenly, one of the gun crew let out a bloodcurdling scream: "It's moving again!" Indeed, the tank had come back to life and began approaching the gun. Another minute, and the tank's gleaming metal tracks crushed the howitzer into the ground as if it were a toy..."

On August 19, 1941, the crew of KV tank No. 864, commanded by Senior Lieutenant Zinovy Kolobanov and assigned to the 1st Tank Battalion of the 1st Tank Regiment of the 1st Tank Division of the 1st Mechanized Corps (Leningrad Military District) lay in ambush on the road from Luga to Gatchina. It was there that a single KV tank encountered a column of forty German tanks. When this unprecedented battle ended, 22 German tanks were smoldering in the field, while our KV, having taken 156 direct hits from enemy shells, returned to its division's positions.

Of course, the outstanding achievements of the best of the best will never become the statistical norm. That is precisely why the author is by no means calling for multiplying the number of KV heavy tanks in service with the troops of the Southwestern Front (of which there were 265) by 22 and comparing the resulting figure with the total number of tanks in the Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group. That's not how it works in war. Moreover, not even all Wehrmacht units—from Brest in Normandy to Brest in Belarus—had that many (6,116) serviceable tanks. Therefore, to summarize this chapter, we will limit ourselves to a simple and well-founded conclusion: the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front had a multiple numerical superiority in tanks over the Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group, coupled with absolute superiority in the quality of their armored vehicles. With even minimally competent command of this gigantic tank horde, the head-on tank battle in Western Ukraine could have ended in only one way—the Red Army's mechanized corps would have simply crushed and wiped out Kleist's tank group.

Like a cockroach.

That's practically how it all turned out. Only the other way around.

RESULTS

Two weeks had passed since the start of the war. The tank battle in the Lutsk–Brody–Rivne "triangle" had come to an end. The 5th Army's mechanized corps had also concluded their second counterattack. Troops of the German Army Group South had broken through into the operational depth of the Southwestern Front's defenses and were rapidly approaching the so-called "Stalin Line" (fortified areas along the old Soviet-Polish border). By the evening of July 8, the Novograd-Volynskyi fortified area had been breached along most of its front; the Wehrmacht's 3rd Panzer Corps rushed toward Zhytomyr, and the 48th Panzer Corps had already captured Berdychiv on the morning of July 8, thereby thwarting all plans of the Soviet command for the systematic withdrawal of the routed divisions of the Southwestern Front behind the old state border.

It was against this backdrop that the following document was drawn up on July 7, 1941: “Report by the Commander of the Southwestern Front to the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army on the Situation of the Front’s Mechanized Corps” (29, pp. 82–83).

The document is brief. We will quote it almost in its entirety. For the reader’s convenience, the distance from the western border will be indicated next to each geographical name, and the percentage of losses (relative to the strength at the start of the war) will be indicated next to the figures for the remaining armored vehicles in the mechanized corps. In addition, the mechanized corps will be listed in the order we adopted in Chapter 2, i.e., first the first-echelon mechanized corps from north to south, followed by the two reserve mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front.

Data on the 16th and 24th Mechanized Corps, which did not participate in the tank battle, will be omitted.

So:

“Soviet Secret

To the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army

I report on the status of the mechanized corps: The 22nd Mechanized Corps is concentrated in the Korosten area (320 km), comprising 340 combat vehicles. (52%)

The 15th Mechanized Corps is concentrated in the Berezovka area (300 km), comprising 66 combat vehicles. (91%)

The 4th Mechanized Corps is concentrated in the Ivnica area (360 km), with 126 combat vehicles in its ranks. (87%)

The 8th Mechanized Corps is concentrated in the Kazatin area (380 km), with 43 combat vehicles in its ranks (95%).

The 9th Mechanized Corps is concentrated in the Korosten area (320 km), with 164 combat vehicles in its ranks. (48%)

The 19th Mechanized Corps is concentrated in the Korchevka area (270 km), with 66 combat vehicles in its ranks. (85%)

In terms of personnel, all corps have suffered losses of approximately 25–30% during the fighting since June 22, 1941.

The Military Council of the Southwestern Front considers it advisable... to withdraw the headquarters of the mechanized corps and tank divisions, corps and divisional units, as well as the tank regiments of the tank divisions and all rear services to the areas of Nezhin, Pryluky, Pyriatyn, and Yagotin... (This is already beyond the Dnieper, 250 km east of the areas where the remnants of the mechanized corps were located on July 7. — M.S.).

Signed: Kirponos, Purkaev, Khrushchev.

First, a small clarification. At first glance, it might seem that the situation in the 9th and 22nd Mechanized Corps was significantly better than average. It appears as though they lost “only” half of their combat equipment.

Alas, these figures merely reflect the lack of reliable information available to the command of the 3rd Army (which had already crossed the Dnieper on July 6 and moved to Brovary near Kyiv) regarding the status of the units under its command. Just eight days later, on July 15, 1941, a report by the chief of the 3rd Army’s Motorized and Armored Directorate entitled “On the Status and Availability of Equipment in the Front’s Mechanized Corps,” it was reported that the 22nd Mechanized Corps had only 30 tanks (instead of 340), and the 9th Mechanized Corps had 32 tanks (instead of 164) (29, p. 101). Given that during that week the mechanized corps were practically being withdrawn from the combat zone across the Dnieper, such a “reduction in numbers” was, in all likelihood, not due to combat losses but simply to the receipt of more accurate reports.

Comments on these reports are practically superfluous. This is a rout. An unprecedented, unparalleled rout. In just two weeks, the Southwestern Front lost more than four thousand tanks (more than the total number of Wehrmacht tanks on the entire Eastern Front).

There is no such thing as a war without losses. But what, then, was the result of the counterattack by the Southwestern Front’s mechanized corps, for which they paid with the loss of 90% of their tank fleet? The authors of the infamous 12-volume *History of World War II* tell their gullible readers that “the Nazis’ offensive along the main axis of Army Group South’s attack had stalled… their main forces found themselves embroiled in protracted battles….”

We will ask the same question again and again—compared to what?

In May 1940, having concentrated a formidable armored force (nine tank divisions, 2,574 tanks) along a 150-km stretch from Liège to Saarbrücken, the Germans broke through the defenses of the French and Belgian armies and, in two weeks—from May 10 to 24—reached the English Channel, covering 300–350 km. The average pace of the advance was 26 km per day. Soviet historians liked to call this—and still call it—“the Wehrmacht’s triumphal march through Western Europe.” Why, then, should the 1st Panzer Group’s breakthrough 300–350 km deep into Western Ukraine over the same two-week period in the summer of 1941 be called “protracted battles”?

According to the Soviet command’s prewar plans, the troops of the Southwestern Front were supposed to reach the Vistula and Dunajec rivers by the 10th–12th day of the offensive, which corresponds to an average advance rate of 10–12 km per day. These were the plans. In reality, however, the supposedly “slowed-down” advance of the German Army Group South deep into Ukraine proceeded at a pace of 20–25 km per day. And why don’t Soviet “historians” recall how many days (or months) it took to liberate the western regions of Ukraine in 1944?

As early as July 15, 1941, a High Command directive signed by Zhukov was issued ordering the disbandment of the mechanized corps. Their brief history ended there. And what about the enemy? Perhaps, after these “protracted battles,” all that remained of its tank divisions were mere numbers? No, the story of the Wehrmacht’s 1st Tank Group was only just beginning. Having broken through the line of fortified areas along the old border and advanced to Kyiv and Bila Tserkva, the German tank divisions turned 90 degrees and rushed south into Ukraine, into the rear of the haphazardly retreating troops of the 6th and 12th Armies of the Southwestern Front. In order to “strengthen command,” the High Command decided on July 25 to transfer these two armies to the Southern Front. While the high

command was figuring out who was responsible for what, in early August both armies (or, more accurately, what remained of them) were surrounded in the Uman area and surrendered. About 100,000 men were taken prisoner, including Major General Ponedelin, commander of the 12th Army, and Lieutenant General Muzychenko, commander of the 6th Army.

After another month of fighting (by September 4, 1941), the irreplaceable losses of the Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group (1st TG) amounted to 186 tanks—that is, ONE-TWENTIETH of the losses suffered by the Southwestern Front during the first two weeks of the war. In addition, hundreds of tanks were damaged and temporarily taken out of action, so that the total number of combat-ready tanks in the 1st Tank Group was halved—to 391 units (10, p. 206).

With this strength (the number of combat-ready tanks roughly corresponding to that of a single Red Army tank division), the "steel avalanche" of the 1st Tank Group crossed the Dnieper near Kremenchug (practically without a fight, simply crossing the mighty river via 1.5-km-long pontoon bridges) and on September 12, 1941, rushed northward to meet the 2nd Tank Group, which was advancing across the Desna River. On September 15, they joined forces in the Dubna–Lokhvytsia area (170 km east of Kyiv), thereby encircling the 21st, 5th, 37th, 26th, and 38th Armies. According to reports from the Wehrmacht command, more than 600,000 people were taken prisoner by the Germans in the massive Kyiv "pocket." On September 20, near the village of Shumeykovo, close to Lokhvytsia, Colonel General M.P. Kirponos, commander of the Southwestern Front; Major General V.A. Tupikov, chief of staff of the front; and M.A. Burmistenko, a member of the front's Military Council, were killed.

Not content with their achievements, Kleist's tank group turned around again—this time by 180 degrees—and, with virtually no operational pause, launched an offensive southward toward the Sea of Azov on September 24. Having advanced 450 km in 15 days, the Germans surrounded and captured another 100,000 men in the Melitopol area; then, turning 90 degrees, they advanced another 300 km to the east and, by November 21, 1941, had captured Taganrog and Rostov-on-Don. In total: more than 1,500 kilometers (not counting the maneuvering inevitable during combat operations), along Soviet "anti-tank" roads, in tanks with narrow tracks and underpowered gasoline engines. Is any further proof needed that the counterattack by the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front in June 1941 not only failed to result in a rout but did not even have any significant impact on the combat effectiveness of Kleist's tank group?

And yet, in one respect, the situation on the Southwestern Front differed fundamentally from that which had developed in the first weeks of the war on the Western Front. In Belarus, the Germans, advancing with two tank groups from Brest and Vilnius toward Minsk, were able to encircle most of the Red Army's forces. The rout of the troops on the battlefield was compounded by the purge carried out by Stalin among the Western Front command. As a result, there were almost no staff documents or well-informed witnesses left, and historians must piece together the picture of events much as paleobiologists reconstruct a dinosaur skeleton from a pair of fossilized bones.

In Ukraine, however, events unfolded differently. Across the entire southern theater of operations, from Polesia to the Black Sea, the Wehrmacht command had only a single tank group at its disposal, and the Germans failed to carry out a major operation to encircle Soviet forces in the first days of the war. Even Soviet divisions that had lost nearly all their military equipment managed to withdraw eastward, preserving their command structures, battle standards, and documents. Moreover, Stalin's reaction to the failure of the Southwestern Front's counteroffensive was incomprehensibly lenient. All the commanders of the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front who survived were promoted. The

highest-ranking among them was Rokossovsky, commander of the 9th Mechanized Corps, who ended the war as front commander, with the rank of marshal and two Gold Stars of the Hero of the Soviet Union. A bright future most likely awaited Vlasov, commander of the 4th Mechanized Corps, as well. After the mechanized corps were disbanded, Vlasov was appointed commander of the 37th Army, the most powerful unit in the Southern Front; after this army was routed in the Kiev "pocket," he successfully commanded the 20th Army in the Battle of Moscow; then Stalin entrusted him with the 2nd Shock Army—and that is where his brilliant career came to an abrupt end and went into a tailspin, straight to the gallows, where this most notorious traitor met his end.

Ryabyshev, commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps, also rose rapidly through the ranks. After the corps was disbanded, he commanded the 38th Army, and from August 30, 1941, he commanded the entire Southern Front! The vacant position of commander of the 38th Army was filled by another former mechanized corps commander—N.V. Feklenko (19th Mechanized Corps). The following also rose to the rank of marshal: K. S. Moskalenko, commander of the 1st Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade (PTAB) of the Southwestern Front; I. H. Bagramyan, chief of the operations department of the Southwestern Front headquarters; and M. E. Katukov, commander of the 20th Tank Division (9th Mechanized Corps) M. E. Katukov. Consequently, there is no shortage of memoirs or scholarly historical literature describing the June battles in Western Ukraine. Many invaluable documents have also survived, including reports from the commanders of the tank divisions of the 4th, 15th, 19th, and 22nd Mechanized Corps.

In short, there is plenty to work with. But before we begin a detailed analysis of the actual events of this "Stalinist offensive"—the second in our account and the most powerful in reality—let's clarify what actually did not happen. Simply so that we do not have to return to discussing these myths again.

WHAT DIDN'T HAPPEN

As you've probably guessed, dear reader, we'll once again be talking about the mighty German air force, the devastating "first disarming strike," and other such wonders.

In Part 1, we tried but failed to find any evidence to support the terrifying stories about how "during a surprise attack, Soviet tank crews were shot down before they could even reach their tanks, and the tanks were burned or captured without their crews…" Nothing of the sort was observed on the Western Front. But perhaps V. Suvorov was referring to the start of hostilities in Western Ukraine? Perhaps it was in the sector of the Southwestern Front that "Soviet reconnaissance planes were unable to take to the skies… Our Cyclops had its eye gouged out. Our Cyclops is blind. He swings his steel fists and roars in helpless rage..."

And who knocked out the "Cyclops's" eye? And with what? The Luftwaffe's 5th Air Corps, operating jointly with Army Group South over Ukraine, consisted of seven bomber and five fighter wings. In total (including temporarily inoperable aircraft), on the morning of June 22, 1941, their ranks included 247 "horizontal" bombers (163 Zi-88s and 103 Ne-111s) and 109 Messerschmitt-109 fighters (24). Not a single Stuka (the symbol of the "Blitzkrieg" so beloved by filmmakers) nor a single Me-110 fighter-bomber was present over the Southwestern Front. From this, in particular, it follows that the Luftwaffe's 5th Air Corps had virtually no capability to bomb moving point targets (such as tanks and armored vehicles).

The German air force was opposed by the Air Force of the Southwestern Front and two (2nd and 4th) long-range bomber corps, totaling at least 1,180 bombers (excluding the obsolete heavy TB-3s) and

1,174 fighters (including 222 of the latest MiG-3s and Yak-1s) (23, 190). In other words, even in terms of the number of “new-model” fighters, the Soviet Air Force held a one-and-a-half-to-one numerical superiority over the enemy! The Germans were unable to overcome such a massive numerical superiority right off the bat, no matter how hard they tried and no matter how much the chaos into which the entire command and communications system of the Southwestern Front had plunged aided them. As a result, the command of the 5th Army Corps, which was tasked with attacking more than 216 airfields west of the Dnieper held by the Southwestern Front’s air force (16, p. 492) with very meager forces, simply lacked the forces and resources to also pursue thousands of Soviet tanks, armored vehicles, tractors, and artillery pieces. Consequently, the deployment of the Southwestern Front’s mechanized corps and their advance to the starting areas for the offensive took place almost without interference from the German air force.

From north to south, from Polesia to the Carpathians, the actual situation was as follows (29, 61, 92):

— 22nd Mechanized Corps. The corps headquarters, the 19th Tank Division, and the 215th Motorized Division were stationed in Rivne before the war (approximately 150 km east of the border). Nothing is known about their losses during the first hours of the war. The 41st Tank Division, which was on the front line, was located significantly further west, in the Volodymyr-Volynskyi area (15 km from the border). This division did indeed suffer casualties: “At 4:00 a.m. on June 22, 1941, it came under long-range enemy artillery fire and, during the mobilization, suffered 10 soldiers killed.”

—15th Mechanized Corps. Pre-war deployment area: Brody–Kremenets (100–135 km from the border). At 4:45 a.m., a report was received that German troops had crossed our state border; a combat alert was declared, and a package containing directives from the headquarters of the Kyiv Special Military District was opened. Incidentally, the report on the combat operations of the 15th Mechanized Corps also specifies the date of approval of the operational plan: May 31, 1941 (!!!). The corps’ divisions began moving to their assembly areas in accordance with these directives. The only mention of losses on the first day of the war is found in the report of the commander of the 37th Tank Division:

“...at the end of the day on June 22, 1941, units of the division in their assembly areas came under enemy air bombardment for the first time. The assembly area of the 73rd Tank Regiment was particularly heavily bombed, as it was concentrated near the Brodsky airfield; however, there were no vehicle losses. Two men were killed by machine-gun fire from the air...”

— 4th Mechanized Corps. Pre-war deployment area: Lviv (80 km west of the border at that time). This mechanized corps was the first to move out. As early as June 20, 1941, the 8th Tank Division and the 81st Motorized Division were placed on combat alert; at the same time, the anti-aircraft artillery battalions of these divisions were recalled from the Lviv assembly area and ordered to provide air cover for the ground forces’ positions. The 32nd Tank Division, stationed on the eastern outskirts of Lviv, was put on alert at 2:00 a.m. on June 22 and began moving through the city streets toward the Yavoriv Highway. The Corps Motorcycle Regiment had left its main deployment area even earlier, as by 9:45 a.m. it had already engaged in combat with German forces that had crossed the San River near the town of Lyatske, 70 kilometers west of Lviv. There are no reports of losses during the march due to enemy bombing.

— 8th Mechanized Corps. Pre-war deployment area: Drohobych–Stryi (70–100 km from the border). As early as June 19, 1941, Corps Commander D.I. Ryabyshev ordered the majority of the personnel to be moved from the barracks in Drohobych to the assembly area. On June 20, by order of the headquarters of the Kyiv Special Military District, all tanks—even those in storage—were fully fueled

and supplied with ammunition. At 3:00 a.m. on June 22, an order was received from army headquarters to “remain on standby and await further orders.” At 10:00 a.m., an order was issued, pursuant to which the corps was placed on alert and, by the end of the day, had advanced to the San River on the western border, west of Sambir.

Early in the morning on June 22, the German air force bombed Drohobych, but, as Corps Commissar (Deputy Commander for Political Affairs) Popel explicitly states in his memoirs, “the corps’ units suffered almost no damage from the bombing.” During the march to the deployment area, one motorized rifle regiment of the 7th Motorized Division came under enemy air attack and suffered 70 killed and 120 wounded. These were the heaviest losses on June 22 among the personnel of all mechanized corps of the 3rd Army Group.

German air forces in this sector were so few in number that, when describing the situation in the afternoon of June 24, Popel noted:

“...the enemy air force had clearly begun to disregard us. Aircraft flew indifferently over our columns, conserving their ammunition for some other purpose...” (105).

Of course, the issue here was not “disregard” (the 8th Mechanized Corps outnumbered the entire Wehrmacht’s 1st Panzer Group in terms of tanks), but a simple shortage of forces, aircraft, and bombs.

So that the reader can assess for themselves to what extent such losses from the “first disarming strike” could have reduced the combat effectiveness of the mechanized corps, we will indicate their numbers:

22nd Mechanized Corps – 24,087,

15th Mechanized Corps – 33,935,

4th Mechanized Corps – 28,097,

8th Mechanized Corps — 31,927 men (3).

These figures are as of June 1, 1941. Given that a covert mobilization had been in full swing in the country since late May 1941, the strength of the personnel in these mechanized corps was likely even higher by June 22.

-16th Mechanized Corps. The corps was part of the 12th Army, which was stretched across a 350-kilometer front in the Carpathians, from the Uzhok Pass to the border with Moldova. In the early days of the war, this was one of the most passive sectors, where small Hungarian units carried out harassing operations aimed at tying down the forces of the 12th Army. General B. Arushanyan (at that time, Chief of Staff of the 12th Army) writes explicitly: “On June 22, 1941, the enemy did not undertake any active operations against the Army’s troops.” The divisions of the 16th Mechanized Corps, deployed in the Stanislav (Ivano-Frankivsk)—Chernivtsi—Kamianets-Podilskyi area, did not engage in their first sporadic skirmishes with the enemy until the morning of June 23.

— 9th Mechanized Corps. The corps was listed as part of the front’s reserve and was stationed deep in the rear, in the Shepetivka–Novograd-Volynskyi area (220–250 km west of the border). On the morning of June 22, 1941, acting in accordance with a prewar operational plan, the corps began its advance toward Rivne–Lutsk. K.K. Rokossovsky writes in his memoirs: “German aircraft appeared quite

frequently. These were mainly bombers flying over us at high altitude, oddly enough, without fighter escort" (111). There is nothing particularly strange about this. The Luftwaffe's small number of fighters were tied up in battles over the border airfields; moreover, the range of the German "Messerschmitts" simply did not allow them to patrol the skies over Shepetivka.

-19th Mechanized Corps. The corps was listed as part of the front's reserve and was stationed deep in the rear, in the Zhytomyr–Berdychev–Kazatin area (350–380 km from the border). It did not come under enemy attack on the first day of the war. The order to advance to the Rivne area was received only in the evening, at 6:00 p.m. on June 22, 1941. While on the march, the columns of the 40th Tank Division west of Novograd-Volynskyi "were repeatedly subjected to enemy air attacks, as a result of which two men were killed and four were wounded." Further on, the combat report of the 40th Tank Division of the 19th Mechanized Corps states that on June 24–25, "while the division was moving toward the Klevan area, the enemy repeatedly attempted to halt the division's advance with air attacks... As a result of the bombing, the division suffered no losses...". The 43rd Tank Division, during its advance toward Rivne, suffered no losses from enemy aviation (as far as can be judged from the division commander's combat report).

That is all that actually happened. Such was the reality of the "sudden, disarming strike by German aviation."

Here, the author feels it necessary to apologize to the readers. Of course, for the families of the Red Army soldiers, to whose homes the first "death notices" arrived, these casualties were the greatest grief of their lives, not "isolated losses." But military history is written in its own, rather specific language. And in that language, the outcome of the first day of the war can be described in only one way: the mechanized corps advanced to their designated starting areas for the offensive, suffering negligible losses from enemy air strikes.

There could be no "first disarming strike," and in reality, there was none.

Having written mountains of paper about what did not happen and could not have happened, Soviet "historians" used another mountain of paper to deny what actually did happen. We are talking about such a crucial component of wartime preparation as mobilization. Every single book, without exception, claimed that "history had given us little time," that our army could not have been "fully ready for war until at least 1942," and that until then we had to do everything in our power to delay, delay, and delay a military confrontation with Germany...

Postpone what? To where? For what purpose?

The author cannot even begin to imagine what "full readiness for war" means. And he is certainly incapable of understanding how many years or centuries it would take to achieve this mysterious state of "full readiness."

Mobilization is an entirely different matter. It is a list of absolutely specific measures that named officials were required to carry out within timeframes set with precision down to the day and hour. Refraining from further amateurish explanations, let us immediately quote an extensive passage from the monograph by General Vladimirsky—who, in those days, was the deputy chief of the operations department of the 5th Army headquarters—and who, by virtue of his service, knew almost everything about mobilization measures (keywords underlined by the author):

“...Mobilization plans in all infantry formations and units had been worked out. They were systematically checked by higher headquarters, refined, and corrected. The allocation to formations and units of personnel, motorized transport, horses, and supply and equipment assets from the national economy’s resources was largely complete...

The divisions were fully supplied with infantry weapons, with the exception of certain types (PPD submachine guns, large-caliber machine guns)...

The infantry divisions were, for the most part, fully supplied with artillery, with the exception of 37-mm anti-aircraft guns, for which the shortage stood at 50 percent. The corps artillery regiments were 82 percent fully equipped with materiel...

The availability of mechanized transport for infantry divisions stood at 40–50 percent. It was planned to replenish the missing vehicles and tractors using resources from the national economy of the eastern regions of Ukraine...

Starting on May 20, 1941, for the purpose of retraining, all privates and non-commissioned officers in the reserve were called up for 45-day training sessions with the rifle divisions. This made it possible to bring the strength of each rifle division up to 12,000–12,500 men, or 85–90 percent of its wartime authorized strength...”

I hope you remember, dear reader, how many thousands of times we were lied to about the fact that “Red Army divisions were maintained at peacetime strength and, by June 22, were half the size of German divisions”? Do you remember how our great “Marshal of Victory” reflected in his memoirs that “on the eve of the war, 19 divisions in the border districts were manned with 5,000–6,000 men each, while 144 divisions had a strength of 8,000–9,000 men each”?

In fact, according to the most authoritative collective monograph by the General Staff, *1941: Lessons and Conclusions*, the strength of personnel in the rifle divisions of the border districts was brought up to: “the 21st Division—to 14,000 men, the 72nd Division—to 12,000 men, and 6 rifle divisions—to 11,000 men” (3, p. 82).

Let us return, however, to Vladimirsky’s book:

“...The mobilization procedure for units, as stipulated by mobilization plans, essentially boiled down to the following. Each unit was divided into two mobilization echelons. The first mobilization echelon included 80–85 percent of the unit’s regular personnel... The time required for the first echelon to be ready to march out to carry out a combat mission was set at 6 hours.

The unit’s second mobilization echelon comprised 15–20 percent of the unit’s regular personnel, as well as all reserve personnel arriving under mobilization. The readiness time for the second echelon of units... was set as follows: for formations deployed in the border zone, as well as for air defense and air force units—no later than the first day of mobilization; and for all other formations—within 24 hours...

All formations and units were assigned mobilization areas outside their deployment locations that were concealed from aerial observation, and procedures were established for the units’ movement to these areas and for their cover during mobilization.

According to the conclusions of the army and district staff commissions that inspected the mobilization

readiness of infantry formations and units in May–June 1941, all infantry divisions and corps-level units were deemed ready for mobilization within the established timeframes...» (92).

So, the traditional version was as follows: the Red Army needed at least another full year to prepare for war. The Germans did not wait chivalrously and attacked an army that was “unprepared for war.”

In a slightly more refined version, this nonsense went like this: it would have taken another two or three weeks to fully complete mobilization efforts, but the Wehrmacht’s rapid advance deep into the country made mobilization impossible. Which was the reason...

But in reality, the covert mobilization was already practically COMPLETE. The infantry divisions of the western military districts (i.e., the backbone of the army at that time and, it should be noted, the main force in the defense!) had practically finished mobilizing, and the scheduled time for them to be ready for combat was measured not even in days, but in HOURS. A small “replenishment force” (the second mobilization echelon) could be brought to full readiness in just one or two days. How, then, could the Germans’ “sudden attack” have deprived the Red Army of those mere hours? Was the USSR, in terms of size, comparable to Luxembourg or Denmark, which the Wehrmacht occupied in a single day? It is also important to note that on the eve of the war, our command had no doubts whatsoever about the feasibility of the specified timeframes for replenishing units and bringing them to full combat readiness.

The main types of infantry and artillery weapons were already in the units (see above). Nor did the 50% shortage of vehicles relative to authorized strength, as noted by Vladimirsky, foreshadow a catastrophe.

The fact is that the “authorized strength” figures themselves, as stipulated by Stalin’s plans for preparing for the Great War, were enormous. For example, according to the April 1941 organizational chart, a howitzer regiment (36 howitzers) in an RKKA rifle division was scheduled to have 73 tractors (i.e., two tractor units per howitzer), $0 cargo vehicles, and 3 passenger cars. Moreover, having two tractors per gun represented a twofold reserve of mechanical traction, and was by no means evidence of the artillery systems’ excessive weight. A 122-mm howitzer weighed about 2.5 metric tons, while a 152-mm howitzer weighed 4.2 metric tons.

Tractors manufactured by the Stalingrad and Chelyabinsk plants (STZ-3, STZ-5, S-60, S-65) were intended for towing divisional howitzers. These were precisely the vehicles capable of traveling on Russian dirt roads in any rain or snow. The tractors provided a towing speed of 10–15 km/h over rough terrain—more than sufficient for a rifle (i.e., infantry) division, where the artillery was required only to keep pace with the soldiers on foot. In any case, the enemy could not even have imagined that an artillery regiment would have 72 tracked tractors. In the sole artillery regiment of a Wehrmacht infantry division, all artillery systems (including 150-mm howitzers) were hauled by teams of six horses.

In reality, by the start of the war, the troops of the Kiev Military District were armed with 2,389 howitzers (1,277 of the 122-mm caliber and 1,112 of the 152-mm caliber) (29, p. 97). As a side note, it should be noted that fully equipping all divisions in the district (2 infantry, 16 tank, and 8 motorized) according to standard staffing levels would have required 2,016 howitzers. And there were 2,239 serviceable tractors in the district’s artillery (not counting the tractors in service with mechanized units!) (152, p. 83). As is easy to see, the number of mechanized towing vehicles is almost equal to the number of items to be towed. In addition, the district’s artillery also had 161 specialized tow trucks (“Komintern,” “Voroshilovets,” “Kommunar”), designed for towing heavy guns.

In a separate anti-tank battalion of a Red Army rifle division, the organizational chart called for 24 motor vehicles and 21 tractors for every 8 45-mm guns (in the anti-tank battalion of a motorized division—27 tractors for every 18 guns). Moreover, the armored tracked “Komsomolets” was used as a tractor — built using components and assemblies from the T-38 light tank, armed with a machine gun in a ball mount, and generally comparable in combat capabilities to the German Rh-1 tankette, which all Soviet historians invariably classified as a “tank.” By July 1941, 7,780 such “Komsomolets” vehicles had been produced, and 6,700 had been delivered to the troops (148). The troops of the Kiev Military District included—Map No. 1

Plan for the Counteroffensive of the Western and Northwestern Fronts Map No. 2 Combat Operations of Boldin’s KMG, June 23–27, 1941

Grodno

Indura

"Yinki"

6th Cavalry Corps

Lomza

Narew River

6MK

Zambrów

Bransk

Wels

O

20

. Dubno

Kuznitsa

11MK

256pd

Sokulka

Białystok

Skidel

Mosty

Volkovysk

Nkm 40 Map No. 4

The right (northern) flank of the Southwestern Front. The positions of the opposing sides as of the morning of June 23, 1941.

Osgrslienka Kh^D / in Varpava / Lovich ’ • Lodz X.] G Demblin* / “Petrokow” ' Radom Kielce'\^ — . Same ' “Tarsów Kraków–Białystok V l ^^ Siedlce^'^ / / G Brest / Lublin to |Sawdimir^ Zamość\ Sławów \ \ / Lviv L ch *Sambor ^Ch Drohobych

Map: Plan of the Offensive in Southern Poland. Direction of the Attack. Line of Advance No. 3 of the Red Army. May 1941. The Red Army on the 30th day of the operation

Map No. 6: Tank battle near Dubno. Combat operations of the “Southern Group” June 26–30, 1941.

There were 1,088 serviceable “Komsomolets” tractors, i.e., an average of 27 tractors per anti-tank division. In short, rumors of a “catastrophic shortage of mechanized traction” in the Red Army’s artillery are greatly exaggerated.

The situation was considerably worse with regard to the mobilization readiness of the mechanized corps. This is understandable. First, a mechanized corps, by definition, requires a huge number of “mechanized vehicles,” including trucks and tractors (crawler tractors), a significant portion of which, according to the plan, was supposed to be working in the national economy right up until the day open mobilization was announced. Second, Stalin’s megalomania—which led to the nearly simultaneous formation of 29 mechanized corps, each with a thousand tanks—exceeded the country’s actual economic capacity.

Having acknowledged all this, let us not rush to conclusions again, but rather proceed to examine specific facts, all taken from the same monograph by Vladimirsky:

“The 22nd, 9th, and 19th Mechanized Corps were formed beginning in April 1941 on the basis of former tank brigades and, by the start of the war, were still in the process of being organized... Although they had a relatively larger number of personnel (a tank division—9,000 men, or 80 percent; a motorized division—10,200 men, or 90 percent of wartime strength), the mechanized formations were understaffed in terms of officers and noncommissioned officers (40–50 percent).... The situation was particularly dire regarding the staffing of units with tank and tank platoon commanders, as well as mechanics, drivers, and other specialists...”

It should not be forgotten, however, which corps Vladimirsky is writing about. According to the prewar plans of the Soviet armored forces command, the 19th Mechanized Corps was not even included among the nineteen “combat mechanized corps” and was being formed with a reduced strength, while the 22nd and 9th Mechanized Corps were not scheduled to complete their formation until 1942. The lack of the authorized number of tank commanders and driver-mechanics was fully “offset” by the lack of the authorized number of tanks. Thus, the 22nd Mechanized Corps had 712 tanks (69%), the 9th

Mechanized Corps had 316 tanks (31%), and the 19th Mechanized Corps had 453 tanks (44%).

Everything is relative. The Wehrmacht, whose numbers had been rapidly expanded since the fall of 1940, faced the very same problems:

"...in tank and motorized divisions, career officers made up 50% of the command staff, while in infantry divisions, the figure ranged from 35 to 10%... The rest were reservists whose professional training was significantly lower..." (189, p. 72). Only in the writings of Soviet propagandists did the notorious "two years of experience in modern warfare" exist. Of the five tank divisions of the Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group

— not a single one took part in the Polish campaign,

— only two took part in the invasion of France (the 9th and 11th Tank Divisions),

-the 14th Tank Division managed to fight for one week in Yugoslavia before "Barbarossa,"

-the 13th and 16th Tank Divisions (formed in October 1940 from infantry divisions) had not participated in any combat operations at all prior to June 22, 1941.

The situation in the 4th, 8th, and 15th Mechanized Corps was significantly better. In particular, the divisions of the 15th Mechanized Corps were manned at 94–100% of their strength with enlisted personnel before the war, junior command personnel at 45–75%, and senior commanders at 50–87%, with the shortage of command personnel mainly attributable to a lack of political officers and administrative and support staff. Even before the conscription of its assigned personnel, the 8th Mechanized Corps, under the guise of "large-scale training exercises" in June 1941, was 89% manned, its artillery regiments were armed with 88% of their authorized number of guns, and the number of 45-mm anti-tank guns even exceeded the "standard" (49 instead of 36). Even before open mobilization was declared, these three mechanized corps each had 2,000–3,000 vehicles, ranging from 165 (15th Mechanized Corps) to 359 (8th Mechanized Corps) tractors and tow trucks. And although they were still far from reaching full strength (5,165 vehicles, which means 1 vehicle for every 6 personnel in the mechanized corps, including tank crews), it is difficult to agree with those authors who claim that "the much-vaunted mechanized corps were nothing more than regular infantry reinforced with tanks...."

Overall, the situation across the entire Red Army was as follows. In February 1941, the troops already had 34,000 tractors (crawler tractors), 201,000 cargo and special-purpose vehicles, and 12,600 passenger cars (16, p. 622). Of course, by February 1941, the Red Army's equipping with military equipment was by no means complete. Factories were operating in three shifts, and the military order for 1941 amounted to 13,150 tractors and tractor-trailers (16, p. 617). By June 1941, the number of vehicles in the Red Army had risen to 273,000 (2, p. 363). Finally, on June 23, open mobilization was announced, and despite all the chaos and confusion of the catastrophic start of the war, by July 1, 1941, another 31,500 tractors and 234,000 vehicles had been transferred from the national economy to the Red Army (3, p. 115). On average, each of the 303 Soviet divisions (of all types, across all military districts) theoretically had 220 tractors and 1,670 vehicles. Per division. On average. This means that the divisions in the western border districts should have had twice as much equipment—after all, the mobilized vehicles and tractors weren't sent to the Siberian Military District...

This is where we might be tempted to celebrate the tremendous achievements of Stalinist industrialization, but in reality, there's nothing to celebrate. We open the reports of Soviet corps and

division commanders and read in practically every one: “The equipment provided for in the mobilization plan did not arrive upon mobilization.” How is that possible? And where, then, did those very “234,000 vehicles and over 31,500 tractors” end up???

Rokossovsky (at that time, commander of the 9th Mechanized Corps) writes that the personnel of the corps’ motorized rifle regiments and divisions—who found themselves at the start of the war with neither horses nor vehicles—had to literally carry on their shoulders mortars, hand-held and mounted machine guns, and ammunition, as a result of which they “were completely exhausted and lost all combat effectiveness.” How is it that the divisions of the mechanized corps received neither 1,700 nor even 170 vehicles from among those mobilized during the first week of the war?

Here is a report from the commander of the 10th Tank Division (15th Mechanized Corps):

“...according to the mobilization plan, the vehicles allocated from the national economy were supposed to arrive by the end of M-2 (i.e., the second day of mobilization): 188 ‘GAZ-AA’ and 194 ‘ZIS-5’. The division did not receive a single vehicle from this number, neither on M-2 nor on any of the subsequent days...”

“A report was received from the commander of the 2nd PTAB, Colonel M. I. Nedelin, stating that he had not yet received any tractors from the national economy and would be able to move only one battalion toward the border”—these are lines from Marshal Baghramyan’s memoirs (PO).

No, it was no coincidence that Nedelin would later become commander of the USSR’s Strategic Missile Forces: even in this situation of total chaos, he managed to deploy an entire artillery division (12 anti-tank guns). As for the 5th Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade, however, as Vladimirsky writes, even by June 29 (the seventh day of the war!) “due to a lack of tractor units, it remained in Novograd-Volynskyi” (250 km east of the border). The exact same situation arose with all the other anti-tank artillery brigades, on all fronts. Not a single brigade—except for Moskalenko’s 1st Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade—fulfilled its mission in the fight against enemy tanks, and all Soviet historians unanimously cite the same reason in all their books: the lack of mechanized transport. How is that possible? Where did all the equipment go—both what was already in the units on June 22 and what was mobilized in the first few days?

Some readers might say that these are merely isolated shortcomings. Very well, here is the broader picture:

“...the mobilization of mechanized transport proceeded extremely poorly... Thousands of vehicles and tractors in need of repair had piled up at the drop-off points. There were cases where vehicles arrived at the military registration and enlistment offices’ drop-off points without fuel, or did not arrive at all due to a lack of fuel on the farms... For example, it was not possible to send vehicles under their own power from the MBO (i.e., from the central, capital district—M.S.) to the Western Military District; by the third day of mobilization, only a quarter of the vehicles had been dispatched... Often, due to the great haste, motor vehicles were loaded onto trains and sent to the front without drivers or fuel... 3,320 trains (50,347 railcars) carrying vehicles were idling on the railways...” (3)

General Vladimirsky also cites some reasons for the strange course of the mobilization:

“...On the evening of June 26, the Military Council of the 5th Army heard a report on the progress of the mobilization of the troops and rear units of the 5th Army. It was established that the mobilization of

the army's troops and logistics units, which according to the mobilization plan was supposed to be completed by 24:00 on June 25—that is, on the third day of mobilization, announced at 00:00 on June 23—had in fact been derailed... The vast majority of the reserve enlisted personnel—native to the western regions of Ukraine (i.e., those occupied in September 1939 during the "liberation campaign" in Poland. — M.S.)—either failed to report to their units in time or evaded mobilization... The limited number of vehicles from local enterprises did not reach the troops, as they were used to evacuate the families of Soviet officials and workers to the east... ."

How charming... The families of WORKERS, traveling in comfort by car, loaded with their household belongings (and a ficus plant to boot), are heading to the rear. Perhaps those who were born and raised somewhere in New Zealand might believe such a thing...

Vladimirsky explains this unexpected and disheartening failure of the reservist mobilization as the result of "the psychological impact of the enemy's sudden attack on the morale of the local population, the rapid eastward shift of the front line, and the subversive activities of enemy agents on our territory."

But that's not all: "The reserve's command and technical personnel, mechanized transport, and drivers assigned from the eastern regions (i.e., those under Bolshevik control since 1919—M.S.) also failed to report to the army..." General Vladimirsky made no further comment on this information...

To conclude this chapter, let us once again emphasize the main point. The Red Army was by no means unarmed. In the course of its covert prewar mobilization, it had already amassed a huge number of men, guns, tanks, and tractors—far exceeding those of the enemy. The disruption of its open mobilization plans weakened its combat capabilities, but by no means reduced them to zero.

And yet, the first toll of the funeral bell had already sounded. Stalin's much-vaunted "order" turned into unprecedented chaos and anarchy within the very first hours of encountering a real, armed enemy. The army's mechanism—which had seemed seamless in theory—began to fall apart into separate "cogs" before the first shots were even fired.

THE MILITARY COUNCIL

Now that we have finished with all the necessary explanations, digressions, and background information, let us move on to the simplest part—a description of the course of the combat operations.

As noted above, Directive No. 3 differed significantly from the prewar plans of the Southwestern Front. On the one hand, the scope of the assigned tasks had been reduced—of the two operational directions (toward Lublin and toward Kraków), only one remained. On the other hand, coordination with the left flank of the Western Front—namely, the idea of a two-pronged encirclement of the German forces in the Lublin area by the adjacent flanks of the Southwestern and Western Fronts, which had been a constant feature of all prewar plans—could no longer be counted on. The 4th Army of the Western Front in the Brest–Kobrin area was literally swept away by an attack from the Wehrmacht's most powerful 2nd Panzer Group; it began a disorderly retreat, and there could be no question of its participation in any offensive operations alongside the 5th Army of the Southwestern Front. Consequently, the second, northern prong of the "tank pincers"—which were supposed to close in the Lublin area behind the enemy group advancing on Lutsk–Brody—had to be formed on the fly, using the very limited forces available to the 5th Army. But by the night of June 22–23 (when, according to Marshal Baghramyan's memoirs, Directive No. 3 was received and decoded), the situation on the 5th Army's front had significantly deteriorated.

The German command, resolutely and boldly concentrating its forces along the main axis of attack, had deployed seven infantry divisions along a 70-kilometer stretch of the border from Vladimir-Volynsky to Krystynopol (now Chervonohrad). All bridges across the border Bug River, guarded by NKVD troops, were captured by the Germans intact. A report from the headquarters of the Wehrmacht's 1st Panzer Group noted:

"...the most important bridge near Sokal was captured intact. The crossing of the Bug River proceeded without incident. The infantry advanced to the heights east of the Bug without encountering any resistance..." (40, p. 227).

By the evening of June 22, German infantry, having crossed the Bug River, had pushed two rifle divisions of the 5th Army back from the border and partially surrounded them. Two tank divisions crossed over to the captured bridgehead and launched an offensive: the 14th Tank Division toward Lutsk, and the 11th Tank Division toward Radekhov (see Map No. 4). The heroic resistance of several garrisons in the Vladimir-Volynsky and Strumilovsky fortified areas (according to local residents, some pillboxes continued firing until the end of June) could not, unfortunately, alter the overall operational situation.

The only strike force available to the 5th Army command in this area was the 41st Tank Division, part of the 22nd Mechanized Corps. In terms of the number of tanks, the 41st Tank Division outnumbered both German tank divisions combined. But on the morning of June 22, the commander of the 41st Tank Division opened the "red packet" and found an order to march north from Vladimir-Volynsky to the Lyuboml–Kovel area. The order was carried out, with the result that the 41st Tank Division literally "threw open the gates" to the Wehrmacht's 14th Tank Division, which was advancing on Vladimir-Volynsky. As a side note, the "red package" quite clearly directed the 41st Tank Division to its starting area for an offensive against Lublin, which may serve as further confirmation that such an offensive had been prepared long before the war began.

It would seem that, given the situation, the command of the 5th Army had two options for using the 41st Tank Division: it could have been thrown into an offensive against Lublin (in accordance with Directive No. 3), or it could have been withdrawn and used for a flanking counterattack against the main enemy force advancing along the highway toward Lutsk. But neither option was carried out. Strangely enough, this was prevented by our own reconnaissance aviation—the "destruction" of which Soviet historians (and, paradoxically, V. Suvorov) lamented bitterly in the very first hours of the war.

The aviation, however, had not been "destroyed." It was flying, and there were many of them (the 315th and 316th Reconnaissance Aviation Regiments, 62 serviceable aircraft, including 38 of the latest high-speed Yak-4 reconnaissance planes), and it reported to the headquarters of the 5th Army and the front that countless enemy hordes were advancing from Brest to Kovel, through the forests and swamps of Polesia. As Baghramyan writes (110), the strength of this group—which did not actually exist—was estimated at the time to be two thousand tanks (even though not a single Wehrmacht tank group actually had even a thousand tanks). Unfortunately, over the course of four days (!!!), failed to clarify the situation—that is, to hop on a motorcycle and ride 140 km in two hours along the highway from Kovel to the suburbs of Brest (it was no longer advisable to enter Brest itself, which had been captured by the Germans on the very first day of the war). It was only on June 27 that the intelligence report of the 3rd Army Group Headquarters, No. 7, finally acknowledged that "reports of large motorized units advancing from Brest toward Kovel have not been confirmed" (29, p. 37). All of this led to the fact that not only the 41st Tank Division but also another division of the 22nd Mechanized Corps (the 215th

Motorized Division) set off along the Rivne–Lutsk–Kovel route into the forests and swamps of Polesia, heading toward the enemy's mythical tanks.

And so it happened that the only unit standing in the way of the Wehrmacht's 14th Tank Division, which was advancing along the highway toward Lutsk, was the 1st Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade under the command of K.S. Moskalenko. It was this brigade that saved the day. Although the 1st Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade entered the battle in the most disadvantageous position—on the move, from makeshift firing positions, without camouflaging their guns— — the courage of the soldiers and commanders, the excellent training and preparation of the artillery crews, and the military talent of the brigade commander proved stronger than the enemy tanks. The German commanders' lack of experience in tank combat also played a role—the 14th Tank Division had been formed in October 1940 from the 4th Infantry Division, and its "track record" consisted solely of the inglorious invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941.

While paying tribute to the soldiers' heroism, we must also, in the interest of accuracy, acknowledge the quality of Soviet weaponry. The powerful guns (76-mm and 85-mm cannons) with which the brigade was equipped could penetrate the armor of any German tank.

Operational Report No. 9 of the 5th Army contained a statement that "between June 23 and 27, the 7th Tank Brigade destroyed and disabled approximately 150 enemy tanks" (75, p. 40). This figure is, of course, greatly exaggerated—by early August 1941, the Wehrmacht's 14th Tank Division had suffered irretrievable losses of only 27 tanks (6 Rh-GU, 17 Rh-Sh, 4 Rh-P), and another 18 tanks were listed as temporarily out of service (10, p. 206). But there is no doubt that, instead of a triumphant march along the highway to Lutsk, the German tanks had to spend three days breaking through the defensive line of the 1st Tank Anti-Airborne Brigade with heavy losses.

Unfortunately, there was no other brigade like this in the Radehiv sector (although the 3rd Army Group had four PTAB brigades on its roster), and—most importantly—there was no one else like Moskalenko. By the end of the day on June 22, the German 11th Panzer Division had advanced with its vanguard units into the Radekhiv area (35 km from the border). -

Further south, in the sector stretching from Rava-Ruska to Przemyśl (this city is now back in Poland and is marked on the map as Przemyśl), German infantry attempted, with varying degrees of success, to drive units of the 6th and 26th Armies back from the border. "In the other sectors of the 26th Army, the situation was not cause for alarm," Baghramyan writes in his memoirs, "and it was completely calm in the sector of the 12th Army, which was holding defensive positions in the Carpathians and Bukovina."

Such was the general situation on the Southwestern Front during those hours, when, on the night of June 22–23, at command post Yu-3. Colonel General Mikhail Petrovich Kirponos (front commander), Lieutenant General Maxim Alekseevich Purkaev (chief of the front staff), and Corps Commissar Nikolai Nikolaevich Vashugin (whose official title was "member of the Front Military Council," but we will henceforth refer to him simply and clearly as "commissar"), as well as Army General Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov, Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army, and First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev—who would later become the head of a nuclear superpower—who had arrived as plenipotentiary representatives of the Supreme Command.

This team was about to make a historic decision. The enormous forces assembled on the Southwestern Front, the exceptionally favorable configuration of the front line (in which the Lviv group of Soviet

troops loomed over the enemy's deep rear), and the front's flanks, reliably shielded by the marshes of Polesia and the Carpathian Mountains—all of this made it possible to set the objective of encircling and completely crushing the enemy's Army Group South. Such a turn of events would have shattered the Germans' entire "Blitzkrieg" plan and inevitably forced them to withdraw troops from the main operational axis of Minsk–Smolensk–Moscow. In short, history would have taken a different course...

From the memoirs of Baghramyan (at that time, the chief of the operations department of the front headquarters), who was present at this meeting, it is known that Purkaev and Vashugin expressed directly opposing views. The chief of staff believed that it was necessary to withdraw troops eastward, to the line of fortified areas along the old Soviet-Polish border, and only then, after stabilizing the defensive front, to go on the offensive.

The Front Commissar demanded that they immediately begin implementing the Supreme Command's directive to launch a counteroffensive.

The author, sitting in a comfortable chair in front of his computer, does not consider himself qualified to judge which of them was right. Moreover, both of them were right—each in his own way.

The Chief of Staff, more than anyone else, understood that, according to prewar plans, the front would need another three or four days to fully mobilize its forces (i.e., conscripting reservists, mobilizing motor vehicles from the national economy, and deploying rear services). The enemy, however, would not wait, and its offensive could disrupt the organized mobilization—which is why it was better to withdraw to a powerful, pre-prepared defensive line and, from behind it, prepare to deliver a decisive counterstrike.

The commissar knew better than anyone else how many thousands of times the Red Army soldiers had been told that the Red Army would be "the most offensive of all armies," that it would crush the enemy "on foreign soil," and so on. A retreat from the very first days of the war—and a retreat as far as 200–250 km, at that—could have a deeply negative impact on the troops' morale—and this is no less dangerous than a shortage of tractors and trucks. Moreover, Purkaev's proposal carried a very negative political subtext—a hasty retreat from the territories "liberated" in September 1939 would have looked like an indirect admission that their seizure was unlawful. The commissar could not allow that to happen. And in his own way, he was, of course, right.

An army relies on a single chain of command. That is why there is a commander at the front: to gather all the sensible suggestions from his subordinates and make a single decision that is binding on everyone. And in the situation that had developed on the Southwestern Front, reconciling opposing views was not all that difficult.

"Fortune favors large battalions," Napoleon used to say. "The god of war does not favor talented adventurers; he favors large armies," wrote the American military historian Taylor a century and a half later.

And in this sense, Zhukov and Kirponos were incredibly fortunate. The command of the Southwestern Front had sufficient forces both to switch to a tenacious defense in the 5th Army's sector and to deliver a crushing blow with the forces of the "three giants" (the 15th, 4th, and 8th Mechanized Corps) in the direction of Lviv–Lublin, against the flank and rear of the entire enemy group advancing along the Lutsk–Radehiv front.

A map lay on the table in front of the generals. It bore the very outline of the “border of mutual state interests on the territory of the former Polish state,” which Stalin had signed in two places on September 28, 1939, upon signing the Treaty of Friendship and Border with Nazi Germany. And now, on the night of June 23, 1941, Zhukov had every reason to raise a faceted glass of tea in a toast to Comrade Stalin’s wisdom and brilliant foresight. Without having fired a single shot, the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front were already deploying effectively behind German lines, and their advance units were already positioned 50–80 km west of the city of Zamość, where the headquarters of the German Army Group South was located.

The strike force, consisting of three mechanized corps (the 15th, 4th, and 8th Mechanized Corps), numbered more than two and a half thousand tanks, including 720 T-34 and KV tanks, which were invulnerable to the 37-mm anti-tank guns of the German infantry divisions. By launching an offensive against the flanks and rear of the main forces of Army Group South—which had been deployed before the war in the Zamość–Lublin area—the Soviet command was able, from the very first days of the war, to impose its will on the enemy, forcing it to hastily alter its well-rehearsed plans, regroup its troops, and lose both time and the initiative. At the very least.

At most, it would have been possible to encircle and rout the German 6th Army without waiting for that army to reach Stalingrad in the summer of 1942. The troops of the Kiev Military District had been preparing for the offensive on Lublin for at least half a year. Routes, defensive lines, and possible enemy countermeasures—all of this had been studied and worked out by the command staff. Finally, such an offensive would have rendered the breakthrough by the German tank divisions—which were thus driving themselves into a deep and inescapable trap near Dubno–Rivne—completely pointless.

On the other hand, regardless of the success (or failure) of the tank strike on Lublin, the command of Army Group South had every opportunity to halt the German advance on Lutsk–Rivne. In fact, within a matter of days, the defensive density of the 5th Army could have been increased many times over. Two infantry corps (the 31st and 36th) had already begun advancing westward on June 18, 1941, pursuant to an order approved by Zhukov himself. By the end of the day on June 23, these corps (six rifle divisions) were located 90–100 km—that is, four days’ march—from the Kovel–Lutsk–Dubno line (92). Tens of thousands of vehicles, which the front’s troops were to receive from the national economy, made it possible to transfer these divisions to the front not in four days, but in four hours. Two divisions—the 135th Rifle Division and the 19th Tank Division, part of the 22nd Mechanized Corps—had reached the eastern suburbs of Lutsk by the morning of June 23. By June 24, two mechanized corps from the front’s reserve, which had begun their march on the morning of June 22, had reached the Styr River line: the 9th and 19th. Finally, having dealt with the mythical enemy group allegedly advancing from Brest toward Kovel, it was possible to return two divisions of the 22nd Mechanized Corps—the 41st Tank and the 215th Motorized—which had been entrenched in the Kovel forests, to active combat operations.

Thus, seven infantry (298th, 44th, 168th, 299th, 111th, 75th, and 57th), two motorized (25th and 16th), and four tank (14th, 13th, and 16th) Wehrmacht divisions advancing along the Lutsk–Radehiv sector, the Southwestern Front was able to field seven infantry, three motorized, and six tank divisions—not counting the two infantry divisions (the 87th and 124th) that had occupied the defensive sector from Ustylug to Sokal even before the war began.

In terms of total tank strength, the Soviet force in the Rivne sector outnumbered the enemy by a factor of 2.5. Even taking into account that the 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps had not been fully mobilized and were not equipped with their standard complement of motor vehicles, the balance of forces

between the sides, according to all the canons of military science, would have allowed, at the very least, for the prevention of a panicked retreat and the initiation of a systematic mobile defense by the 5th Army's troops, moving from line to line toward the east.

Contrary to a widespread misconception, the Red Army's Field Regulations by no means ruled out the conduct of defensive operations, including mobile defense. In Field Regulation PU-39, this issue was described in great detail:

"Paragraph 417. Mobile defense is employed in cases where the enemy's overwhelming superiority precludes the conduct of a stubborn defense on a normal or wide front. The objective of mobile defense is to gain the time necessary—at the cost of losing ground—to organize a defense on a new line, to ensure the concentration of troops in a given direction, or to ensure the freedom of action of troops in other directions.

A mobile defense is conducted within a designated sector and consists of a series of successive defensive engagements along pre-determined lines.

The number of defensive lines in a given sector and the duration of resistance at each of them depend on the time required to delay the enemy and are determined by the senior commander...

Par. 419. Troops defending an intermediate line must inflict casualties on the advancing enemy, force it to change course, cause it to lose time organizing its attack, and, without engaging in close combat, slip out from under the blow..."

Nature itself took care of establishing defensive lines in the 5th Army's sector. From south to north, at nearly equal intervals of 50–70 km, the terrain is crossed by tributaries of the Pripyat: the Turya, Stokhod, Styr, Goryn, and Sluch. In his monograph, General Vladimirsky describes these rivers as "water barriers of operational-tactical significance. Their riverbeds ranged in width from 15 to 70 m, their valleys from 0.5 to 2 km; in places, the riverbanks were marshy and the riverbeds were muddy." In short, the terrain was quite unfavorable for tanks. Especially if four (!!!) anti-tank brigades—which the Southwestern Front had at its disposal—were deployed at the bridges and crossings.

At the same time, we must emphasize again and again that, in the situation that had developed, the troops of the 5th Army were not required to "fight to the death." It was necessary—and sufficient—merely to slow down the German advance and engage their tank divisions in combat. In and of itself, an organized and systematic withdrawal of Soviet troops 200–250 km from the border to the line of the Horyn or Sluch rivers posed no real threat. For France, a retreat of 200 km meant the fall of Paris; for Germany, a retreat of 150 km from the French border meant the loss of the entire Ruhr industrial region. But the Soviet Union's geography was entirely different. Neither economically nor operationally could the temporary loss of the Volyn and Rivne regions of Western Ukraine have had any serious impact on the course of the war.

Alas, at the Military Council in Ternopil, Zhukov and Kirponos did not dare to switch to mobile defense in the 5th Army's sector, nor to launch a large-scale offensive with the forces of three mechanized corps in the Lublin direction.

Major General M.I. Potapov, commander of the 5th Army, was ordered to advance with the objective of "crushing the enemy's Vladimir-Volyn group and restoring the situation along the border." He was to advance immediately, without waiting for the arrival of front-line reserves (two rifle corps and two

mechanized corps). And since Zhukov, even on June 24–25, continued to believe in the existence of large enemy motorized and mechanized forces in the Brest–Kovel direction, he “in a firm and confident tone” (as Vladimirsky writes in his book) ordered Potapov to bend the army’s right flank and “reliably shield Kovel from an enemy attack from the Brest direction.” As a side note, by this point Guderian’s tank group had already advanced 160 km from Brest to Slonim, and the general direction of its movement (toward Minsk–Bobruisk) left no room for doubt. As a result, to carry out the order to advance on Vladimir-Volynsky, Army Commander Potapov was able to commit only the two divisions that had already reached Lutsk: the 135th Rifle Division and the 19th Tank Division.

Lieutenant General I.N. Muzychenko was ordered to immediately attack the enemy tank group advancing on Radekhov–Berestechko using only the 15th Mechanized Corps, without waiting for the other two mechanized corps (the 4th and 8th) to concentrate in the Brody area. The decision to redeploy the 4th and 8th Mechanized Corps 100–150 km east of the border, to the area around the town of Brody, clearly indicated that the command of the 3rd Army had tacitly abandoned the offensive from the Lviv salient toward Lublin (as provided for in Directive No. 3). Instead of a deep offensive operation (the theoretical planning of which is invariably cited as an example of the highest level of Soviet military science), it was decided to engage in a frantic “plugging of gaps” through hastily organized frontal tank attacks.

Perhaps the most diplomatic thing one can say about such “operational art” is that the decision made was “not the most optimal.”

“The enemy, having started the war with a surprise attack, dictated its will to us and thwarted our plans” (105).

And so, in just a dozen words, N.K. Popel said practically everything: about the prewar plans (according to which his corps moved toward the crossings over the border river in the very first hours of the war), about the fact that a German attack was not anticipated in these plans at all, and about the front command, which allowed the enemy to “dictate its will to us” from the very first days of the war.

“Fortune favors the large battalions...”

If the forces of the opposing sides in the southern theater of operations had been roughly equal, the decision made on the night of June 23 to counterattack the enemy with scattered strikes by individual units and formations would have led to the immediate and catastrophic collapse of the Southwestern Front. Similar to what actually happened in the early days of the war to the troops of the Western Front in Belarus and the Northwestern Front in Lithuania.

But it was not for nothing that the world’s largest and richest country had been starving for two decades, huddling in barracks and “communal apartments”; it was not for nothing that, even in peacetime, the USSR’s military factories operated in three shifts; it was not for nothing that, in a country of workers and peasants, a nursing mother was sent back to the workbench just two months after giving birth; it was not for nothing that the brightest minds of the multinational Soviet people toiled day and night over the blueprints of tanks and airplanes. The result of these great efforts was “substantial, crude, and visible.” Zhukov, Kirponos, Muzychenko, and others were provided with such gigantic armed forces and such a quantity of the latest weaponry that, it would seem, their sheer scale alone could compensate for the leadership’s incompetence.

In fact, the 15th Mechanized Corps “alone”—which had been ordered to attack the enemy’s Radehiv

group without waiting for the arrival of the other two mechanized corps—had 749 tanks at its disposal—five times more than the opposing 11th Panzer Division of the Wehrmacht. And among these 749 tanks were 136 with specifications that German tank crews could only dream of. Even on the Lutsk front, where "only" two fresh Soviet divisions (the 19th Tank Division and the 135th Rifle Division) were to launch a counterattack against the Wehrmacht's 14th Tank Division—which had already been severely battered by Moskalenko's artillery—the balance of forces, it would seem, did not portend any trouble.

Or so it would seem...

JUNE 23–25, 1941

Our analysis of how the decisions made on June 23, 1941, at the Military Council in Ternopil were carried out will begin with the most important—and most powerful—element on the Southwestern Front: General Vlasov's 4th Mechanized Corps. This will not take us much time or paper—the 4th Mechanized Corps took almost no part in the planned counterattack (for what lies behind the word "almost," see below).

The Red Army high command had placed its greatest hopes on this corps. In August–September 1940, a series of ^large-scale military exercises was conducted by the 4th Mechanized Corps on the following topics: "deploying a mechanized corps into a breach," "actions of a mechanized corps deep within the enemy's operational defense," and "march and counterattack." The final exercise, held on September 26–28, was personally attended by People's Commissar of Defense Timoshenko and the then-Chief of the General Staff, Meretskov. A.A. Vlasov, a "rising star" among the Soviet general staff, was appointed commander of the 4th Mechanized Corps. The 4th Mechanized Corps was equipped with 414 of the latest T-34 and KV tanks—exactly the same number as in all the other mechanized corps of the Southern Front combined. Shortly after hostilities began, two RGK artillery regiments (the 441st and 445th) were placed under Vlasov's operational command. These regiments were equipped with the latest artillery systems: 152-mm ML-20 howitzers with mechanical (tractor) traction.

How was this steel armada used?

As early as the night of June 22–23, 1941, Zhukov, who had personally arrived at the command post of the 3rd Army, demanded that the commander of the 6th Army, Muzychenko, "transfer the 4th Mechanized Corps to the army's right flank as quickly as possible," that is, to the area of the planned counterattack from Brody to Radekhov. But that was not to be—Lieutenant General Muzychenko easily and nonchalantly ignored the direct order from the Army General, the representative of the Supreme Command, and the Chief of the General Staff. Not only did Muzychenko fail to hand over "his" 4th Mechanized Corps, but he even attempted (albeit unsuccessfully) to "snatch" the "foreign" 8th Mechanized Corps from the front command. Ultimately, the powerful 4th Mechanized Corps neither captured the city of Lublin "by the end of June 24" nor caught up with and crushed the Wehrmacht's 1st Panzer Group. For several days, the corps was shuttled back and forth within the "enchanted triangle" of Nemirov–Mostyska–Lviv, serving as a "fire brigade" with which Muzychenko attempted to halt the German infantry's advance on Lviv. In a report by Colonel E.G. Pushkin (who was killed in action on March 11, 1944, holding the rank of Lieutenant General of the Tank Forces), commander of the 32nd Tank Division of the 4th Mechanized Corps, the events of those days are described as follows:

"...June 23, 1941. The division received an order to, in coordination with the 8th Tank Division and the

81st Motorized Rifle Division, encircle and destroy the enemy in the area... Having traveled less than 30 km, it received a second order at 10:00 a.m. while on the march—to destroy enemy tanks in the area of Mosty Velke. The division's column had to make a 180-degree turn on a single road. Upon arrival in the area of Mosty Velke, the division did not detect any enemy tanks.

At 5:00 p.m., a new order was received from the commander of the 6th Army to destroy an airborne landing force and 300 enemy tanks in the Kamenka Strumilova area. Units of the division and the Golyas tank group began to carry out the new order, but no enemy tanks were found there, and there were friendly units in Kamenka Strumilova... The division's tank regiments marched an average of up to 100 km over the course of the day...

June 24, 1941. By 1:00 a.m., the division had concentrated in the area of... At 11:00 a.m., a new order was received to concentrate in the area of... by 3:00 p.m. on June 24, with the task of destroying the enemy in the area of Olshina, Khotynets, and Mlyny. The 32nd Motorized Rifle Regiment, on orders from the commander of the 4th Mechanized Corps, was sent to Lviv as part of the army's reserve (thus, Muzychenko had definitively left the 32nd Tank Division without motorized infantry. — M.S.). As the division marched through the streets of Lviv, it encountered an oncoming stream of combat and transport vehicles from the 8th Mechanized Corps (the 8th MC was moving east to catch up with German tanks, while the 32nd Tank Division was once again returning west toward the border. — M.S.). In the streets of Lviv, street battles were raging with saboteurs (a full-scale armed uprising by Ukrainian nationalists had begun in the city. — M.S.). With great difficulty, overcoming traffic jams of vehicles, the division had concentrated in the area by 2:00 a.m. on June 25, 1941...

2 June 1941. At 10:00, the division received an order from the commander of the 4th Mechanized Corps, according to which the division was to support the 6th Rifle Corps' offensive, but the headquarters of the 6th Rifle Corps assigned the tank division an independent task—to attack in the direction of a heavily fortified anti-tank zone featuring a river and marshy terrain, without providing the division with support from either infantry or artillery...

June 2, 1941. At 4:00 a.m., the division received an order from the commander of the 4th Mechanized Corps to move into the area of Grudek Jagielloński and Sudowa Wisznia with the task of destroying a column of 300 enemy tanks moving from Mościska toward Lviv. By 6:00 p.m., the division had concentrated in the Zamlyne area, but there were no enemy tanks in that area (in the 6th Army's combat zone, at the tip of the Lviv salient, there were no German tank units at all. — M.S.). The division covered an 85-kilometer march during the day. At 5:00 p.m., an order was received for the division to concentrate in the Obroshin area and be ready for action at Lyuben Velky.

June 7, 1941. By 7:00 a.m., the division had concentrated in the area of Konopnica Zastawa and Obroshin, with the mission to destroy the enemy in the direction of Lubień Wielki. The division undertook a 40-kilometer night march... According to corps headquarters, an enemy force was reported to be positioned in the Lyuben Velky area; in reality, however, no such force was found...'

Although the geometric dimensions of the 4th Mechanized Corps' "maneuver triangle" were quite small (approximately 50–60 km per side), the division, according to its commander's report, "during the first three days, June 23–25, covered a total of 350 km without adequate rest for the crews or time to replenish supplies. The marches took place both day and night. The execution of the marches was satisfactory, despite the insufficiently trained drivers. During this period, the division did not engage in combat operations due to the absence of the enemy (emphasis mine—M.S.) in the specified areas" (28, pp. 181–189).

The infantry with which the 4th Mechanized Corps engaged was not ordinary infantry, but mountain infantry (the Wehrmacht's 1st and 4th Mountain Rifle Divisions). This, in particular, means that they were not equipped with 105-mm heavy guns, which, at least in theory, could have been used by standard Wehrmacht infantry divisions to combat the KV and T-34 tanks. The standard German 37-mm anti-tank gun, however, was practically useless against the new Soviet tanks, a fact that was once again confirmed in the battles near Lviv. The commander of the 32nd Tank Division writes in his report: "The armor of our tanks cannot be penetrated by the Germans' 37-mm guns; there were instances when a KV tank sustained up to 100 hits, yet the armor remained intact."

Here is how the battles on the western approaches to Lviv are described in the history of the Wehrmacht's 1st Mountain Infantry Division: "...early in the morning of June 25, Russian tanks appeared one after another at the edge of the forest near the village of Yazuv Stary... Our 3.7-cm anti-tank gun calmly waited for the tanks to approach within firing range. When the distance closed to 600 m, the gun opened fire. Virtually every shot hit its target. The tracer rounds are clearly visible. However, later we can no longer believe our eyes: our anti-tank shells are simply ricocheting off the tanks. Without pausing, the enemy tanks continue to advance toward us, firing from all their guns..." (152, p. 162).

Even the latest (as of the summer of 1941) German 50-mm antitank gun proved to be of little use in combat against the tanks of the 4th Mechanized Corps. In the account of the combat operations of the Wehrmacht's 4th Mountain Infantry Division, we read:

"The advance group reached the Grudek Jagielloński–Lviv highway. In the vicinity of the village of Kaltwasser, the group encountered enemy tanks. The shells from the 3.7-cm and 5-cm anti-tank guns were unable to penetrate their armor. The courageous artillerymen continued to fire their 5-cm guns even when the tanks were already 5 meters away from them. The tanks ran over the guns. Material losses were enormous..." (152, p. 209).

Having given up on "persuading" the commander of the 6th Army to transfer the entire 4th Mechanized Corps to participate in the front-line counterattack, the commander of the 3rd Army f. on the morning of June 24 ordered the 8th Tank Division to be withdrawn from the 4th Mechanized Corps and placed at the disposal of General Karpezo, commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps. However, in reality, the 8th Tank Division did not reach the Radehov–Lopatin area (60 km northeast of Lviv) until the morning of... June 28!

Meanwhile, in the Yavoriv–Nemiruv area, German infantry broke through the 6th Army's front at the junction between the 97th and 159th Rifle Divisions of the 6th Rifle Corps. On June 24, an attempt was made to close this breach using forces from the 81st Motorized Division of the 4th Mechanized Corps. On the same day, three regiments of this division—the tank regiment, the artillery regiment, and the 323rd Motorized Rifle Regiment—were surrounded by German infantry in the Nemirov area. It is not entirely clear how infantry could "surround" a tank regiment armed with 270 BT tanks, but by evening the rout was complete. All heavy equipment was lost; most of the personnel were missing in action; the commander of the 323rd Motorized Rifle Regiment was killed; the division commander, Colonel Varypaev; the deputy division commander, Colonel Barabanov; the division chief of staff, Colonel Spesivtsev; the heads of the division headquarters' operations and intelligence departments, the division artillery chief, the artillery regiment commander, and the chief of staff of the 323rd Motorized Rifle Regiment. As for the 97th and 159th Rifle Divisions, on June 29, a report by the Military Council of the 6th Army described their condition as follows: "The 159th Rifle Division has lost its command,

has been disrupted by air attacks, and is completely incapable of fighting... The 97th Rifle Division has suffered significant losses and lost its senior command staff...” (29, p. 199).

While the 4th Mechanized Corps was floundering in the “cursed triangle” Nemirov—Mostyska—Lviv, another tank “giant”—General Ryabyshev’s 8th Mechanized Corps—was moving toward the area of the future tank battle in a wide, sweeping zigzag, like a skier in a giant slalom.

On the eve of the war, the 8th Tank Corps was part of the 26th Army, which, according to prewar plans, was to advance in the direction of Sambor–Rzeszów–Tarnów. As early as 10:00 a.m. on June 22, an order arrived from army headquarters, pursuant to which the corps was put on alert and, by the end of the day, having passed Sambor, reached the border river San. Then, on the evening of June 22, at 10:40 p.m., a new order arrived: by noon on June 23, the 8th Mechanized Corps (which had already advanced 80 km west from Drohobych toward the San) was to concentrate in the Kurovichi area (25 kilometers east of Lviv, which meant a retreat of 120 km from the border) and place itself under the command of Muzychenko, commander of the 6th Army. Tank columns stretching for many kilometers began moving backward, tracing a huge detour more than 150 km long along the route Sambir–Drohobych–Stryi–Lviv.

By midday on June 23, when the main forces of the tank divisions were roughly at the line of the city of Mykolaiv (38 km southwest of Lviv along the highway), and the 7th Motorized Division had already reached the outskirts of Lviv, Muzychenko ordered the 8th Mechanized Corps to turn west and, by 7:00 p.m. on June 23, to concentrate in the forest south of Yavoriv (i.e., in the very same area where Muzychenko, contrary to the orders of the front command, had also directed the main forces of the 4th Mechanized Corps). Huge columns of tanks, trucks, and armored vehicles turned around nearly 180 degrees for the second time in the past 24 hours and once again headed toward the border. After a grueling night march, the 8th Mechanized Corps, having covered another 80–90 kilometers, reached Yavoriv (see Map No. 4). There, late in the evening of June 23, the corps commander was handed a package containing a new (but in essence, an old, so to speak, “initial”) order from the front command: to turn the corps around again and reach the Brody area by the end of the day on June 24.

But that was not all. On that very same day, Muzychenko made a final attempt to “set aside” at least one division from the 8th Mechanized Corps. In accordance with Combat Order No. 003 of June 23, 1941, issued by the commander of the 6th Army: “The 34th Tank Division is part of the 6th Army and reports directly to the Army Military Council. The division is to be ready to launch an attack in the directions of Nemirov, Yavoriv, and Krakovets” (29, p. 185).

This attempt at acting on its own initiative proved unsuccessful, however, and the 34th Tank Division remained part of the corps.

Due to traffic jams and street fighting in Lviv, it was not possible to complete another forced march by the deadline specified in the command’s Order No. Yu-3. f.: by the evening of June 24, the corps’ main forces had concentrated in Busk, while the 34th Tank Division, having avoided getting caught up in the labyrinth of Lviv’s streets, advanced through Zholkev (Nesterov) to the Bug River near Kamenka-Bugskaya. By this time, Kamenka had already been captured by German advance units, and the troops had to fight their way through the city. It was not until 6:00 a.m. on June 26 that two tank divisions (the 12th and 34th) of the 8th Mechanized Corps reached the area of Brody (i.e., the starting point for a counterattack against the flank of the advancing German tank divisions), while the corps’ third division (the 7th Motorized Youth Division) was at that time on the march between Busk and Brody, lagging 20–25 km behind the tank divisions.

Although the distance from Drohobych to Brody does not exceed 150 km as the crow flies, the corps' tank divisions covered (as evident from the report of the commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps dated July 18, 1941) 500 km, "leaving behind on the roads during their marches up to 50% of their combat equipment" (28, p. 166). Most likely, this estimate of "march losses" clearly reflects a desire to justify the corps' defeat (which, by the time the report was written, had already become a fait accompli). Thus, in another text, Ryabyshev writes that "during a march spanning nearly 500 km, the corps lost up to half of its obsolete tanks." Finally, a simple summation of the data on losses and the number of KV and T-34 tanks remaining in service leads to the conclusion that even after the battles and losses of the first day of the offensive (June 26), the corps still had 141 "new-type" tanks at its disposal, which amounts to 83% of their original strength. Be that as it may, the forced 500-km march was bound to result in a large number of breakdowns, and given that the territory through which the 8th Mechanized Corps had been rushing for three days and three nights was occupied by the enemy just three or four days later, all tanks that had temporarily been put out of action were reclassified as "irretrievable losses."

The combat operations of the 22nd Mechanized Corps on the Vladimir-Volyn direction ended in complete defeat. Apparently, the death of Corps Commander Major General S.M. Kondrusev (Marshal Moskalenko's memoirs indicate that this tragic event occurred on the first day of the war and almost before his very eyes, but General Vladimirsky writes in his monograph that Kondrusev was killed on the evening of June 24, during or after the battle near the village of Voynitsa).

Two divisions of the 22nd Mechanized Corps (the 19th Tank Division and the 215th Motorized Division) were stationed in Rivne before the war. After a night march, they reached the Lutsk area by the morning of June 23 (see Map No. 4). After that, a flurry of orders from the front command and the 5th Army led to the 215th Motorized Division moving along the Lutsk–Kovel highway to engage a mythical "enemy tank group" allegedly advancing from Brest toward Kovel. The 19th Tank Division also received orders to move toward Kovel, but then the decision was reversed, and at dawn on June 24, the 19th Tank Division was tasked with counterattacking, together with the 135th Rifle Division and supported by the 1st Mechanized Rifle Brigade, against the enemy advancing along the highway from Volodymyr-Volynskyi to Lutsk.

On the eve of the war, the 19th Tank Division possessed substantial combat power. The division's artillery was fully equipped with its standard complement of weapons: 12 152-mm howitzers, 12 122-mm howitzers, 18 82-mm mortars, and 27 50-mm mortars. The division had 52 tractors for towing artillery pieces and evacuating damaged tanks from the battlefield. Despite the alleged lack of radio communication equipment in the Red Army, the 19th Tank Division also possessed: 2 powerful RSB radio stations, 4 regimental 5-AK radios, 52 battalion radios (RB, 6-PK, RRU), as well as 85 71-TK radio stations mounted on half-tracks and armored vehicles. The division's armored and tank forces included 158 tanks (122 T-26s, 7 OT-26 flamethrower tanks, 12 BT-7s, and 17 BT-5s) and 58 BA-10 gun armored cars (8, 92).

The enemy (the 14th Panzer Division, part of the Wehrmacht's 1st Panzer Group) was outnumbered (a total of 147 tanks, including 11 "commander's tanks" armed with machine guns), but superior in quality: The 14th Tank Division included 56 RG-Sh tanks equipped with 50-mm guns, which undoubtedly had superior armor protection compared to the light Soviet T-26 tanks.

On the other hand, the 19th Tank Division was to engage in battle alongside the 1st Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade, which, by the start of the war, was armed with 120 guns (76-mm and 85-mm calibers) that

were guaranteed to penetrate the armor of any German tank. Finally, the 21st Artillery Regiment of the RGK was also positioned along the line of the impending counterattack; it was armed, in particular, with 20 long-range 122-mm guns—weapons of such power that they could penetrate the frontal armor of a KV tank, not to mention German tanks. All that remained was to coordinate the large Red Army forces concentrated in the area of the Vladimir-Volynskyi–Lutsk highway and "smear the Wehrmacht's 14th Panzer Division across the asphalt."

The subsequent course of events is not entirely clear. According to Moskalenko's memoirs, on June 23 and the morning of June 24, the 1st Tank-Assault Brigade fought fierce battles against German tanks and motorized infantry advancing along the highway toward Lutsk, without any coordination with units of the 22nd Mechanized Corps:

"...We agreed that at 4 a.m. (June 23—M.S.) we would meet again, but this time at the edge of the forest east of Zaturtsy (37 km west of Lutsk along the highway—M.S.), to coordinate our actions. But neither Tamruchi (chief of staff, later commander of the 22nd Mechanized Corps) nor Artemenko (commander of the 27th Rifle Corps) showed up at the appointed time... The brigade, having moved eastward, took up defensive positions in the Zaturtsy area, dug in, and camouflaged itself... Having never met with Tamruchi and Artemenko, I realized that the brigade would have to fight the enemy on its own" (75, p. 33).

Slowly retreating while fighting from one line to the next, Moskalenko's anti-tank brigade took up defensive positions near the town of Torchyn on the morning of June 24, 25 km west of Lutsk, and by the end of the day was already fighting in the suburbs of Lutsk. On the other hand, Vladimirsky's monograph indicates that a tank engagement took place near the village of Voynitsa, i.e., 25 km west of Torchyn. "By the morning of June 24, the 19th Tank Division had not yet arrived at the starting line, and therefore the counterattack, scheduled for 4:00 a.m. on June 24, was postponed to a later time... The 19th Tank Division, which arrived at 13:00 on June 24, had in its ranks only 45 serviceable T-26 tanks and 12 armored vehicles (emphasis mine—M.S.)... At 2:00 p.m. on June 24, in coordination with the 135th Rifle Division, the 19th Tank Division attacked the enemy in the direction of Paseka and Voynitsa... At 5:00 p.m. on June 24, the enemy, having committed tanks to the battle, again attacked the 135th Rifle Division and the 19th Tank Division... As a result of the two-hour battle, the 19th Tank Division, having lost most of its tanks, and the 135th Rifle Division and the 1st Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade—having lost a significant number of personnel and artillery equipment—began to withdraw to a line 12–16 km west of Lutsk..." (92).

It is difficult to reconcile these two descriptions of the fighting on the Vladimir-Volynskyi–Lutsk highway. The author is inclined to believe Moskalenko, who was both an eyewitness and a key participant in these events. Most likely, the 1st 11th Tank Assault Brigade and the 19th Tank Division operated separately; moreover, in the Voynitsa area on the afternoon of June 24, the strike group consisting of the 19th Tank Division and the 135th Rifle Division could have encountered only a portion of the forces of the German 14th Panzer Division, since the advance units of the German 14th Panzer Division were at that time attempting to break through the defenses of Moskalenko's brigade in the Gorchina area—that is, they were already considerably east of Voynitsa.

The only thing that is beyond doubt is the tragic outcome of the tank battle near Voynitsa. Let us hear from Marshal Rokossovsky:

"...by the evening of June 25, the commander of the 19th Tank Division, Major General Semenchenko, arrived on foot at our corps command post in the Klepani area (90 km east of Voynitsa—M.S.) in a

state of great distress, with his right hand bandaged. He reported that his division had been completely routed... Soon after, one of the regimental political commissars from the same corps arrived and reported the death of General Kondrusev and that the corps had been defeated. The defeatist tone and confusion of the division commander and the regimental political commissar compelled me to advise them quite sternly to immediately cease their ranting about the corps' defeat..." (111).

Unfortunately, this "rambling" was not without basis. Here is how Moskalenko describes his encounter with the remnants of the 22nd Mechanized Corps, which took place on the afternoon of June 25:

"...rear units and horse-drawn artillery from the 27th Rifle and 22nd Mechanized Corps suddenly rushed onto the bridge. In a state of panic, several hundred men, jostling one another, tried to break through to the eastern bank. Their horses broke their legs between the bridge ties, and wagons and artillery pieces piled up in a heap. A traffic jam formed. And then the Germans opened artillery fire on the bridge. An unimaginable commotion ensued..." (75).

The state of affairs in the 19th Tank Division is convincingly illustrated by the fact that it took this tank division one and a half days to march from Lutsk to Voynitsa (50 km), with only 45 of the 158 tanks reaching the battlefield, and only 12 of the 58 armored vehicles. In the battle near Voynitsa, the commanders of the division's two tank regiments and one motorized rifle regiment were killed. Most likely, such enormous losses among the command staff were the result of a courageous but disorganized attempt by a handful of tank crews still in action to launch a head-on attack against German medium tanks using light T-26s with anti-bullet armor.

Even stranger events unfolded in the 215th Motorized Division. On the morning of June 23, the division moved toward Kovel. It was not until June 25 (i.e., after the 19th Tank Division had already been routed) that the 215th Motorized Division, on the northern outskirts of Volodymyr-Volynskyi, encountered the Wehrmacht's 298th Infantry Division, which was advancing eastward from the city.

Before the war, the 133rd Tank Regiment of the 215th Motorized Division was equipped with 129 BT tanks.

Moreover, prior to the offensive on Volodymyr-Volynskyi, it was assigned (in addition to its "own" units) one of the tank regiments (according to other sources, two tank battalions) from the 41st Tank Division. Nevertheless, as Vladimirsky writes, in the battle on June 25, the 215th Motorized Division operated as an infantry unit, "without a tank regiment."

So where did the tanks go? There are reports that the 215th Mechanized Division's tank regiment fell behind allegedly because it "ran out of fuel" — even though the total length of the route from Rivne to Lutsk to Kovel to Volodymyr-Volynskyi is 190 km by highway (significantly less than the range of BT tanks), and the 5th Army's depots held enough fuel for 33 (thirty-three) refuelings (92).

The engagement with the German infantry division ended with the 215th Motorized Division (as Vladimirsky writes) concentrating in the Sofianovka area, 50 km east of Kovel, as early as the very next day, June 26. In other words, the division was routed and driven back 80 km to the northeast of the battlefield (as always, there was enough fuel for this march). 129 BT tanks from the 133rd Tank Regiment simply vanished without a trace in the known sources. True, at the end of June, the 215th Tank Division still had 15 tanks
on its roster (according to Vladimirsky), but these were T-26s that had likely "tag-alonged" with the division from other units.

The largest unit within the 22nd Mechanized Corps was the 41st Tank Division. It was armed with 414 tanks (more than the other two divisions of the corps combined), including 31 KV-2 super-heavy tanks armed with 152-mm howitzers.

As noted above, on the first day of the war, the 41st Tank Division withdrew from the main operational direction—the Vladimir-Volynskyi–Lutsk highway—into the wooded and marshy area around Kovel. There, the division effectively came under the command of Colonel I.I. Fedyuninsky, a protégé of Zhukov and commander of the 15th Rifle Corps. This was a truly remarkable figure. In June 1941, Colonel Fedyuninsky commanded generals (the chief of staff of the 15th Rifle Corps was General Rogozny, and the commander of the corps' 45th Division was General Sherstyuk). On October 8, 1941, the former corps commander, now Major General Fedyuninsky, took command of an entire front from Zhukov—and what a front it was: the Leningrad Front! True, 18 days later, this brilliant career ascent took a nosedive, and during the final stage of the Great Patriotic War, General Fedyuninsky faded into the background.

And in June 1941, Colonel Fedyuninsky (as did Major General M.I. Potapov, commander of the 5th Army) deployed the powerful tank force at his disposal in a manner quite typical for those days. The division was immediately broken up into separate regiments, battalions, and tank companies, which were tasked with either scouring the swampy forest in search of nonexistent German "paratroopers," guarding headquarters, or covering the 15th Cavalry Corps' retreat from Kovel into the wilds of Polesia. While the 19th Tank Division and the 215th Motorized Division fought for at least one day, the story of the 41st Tank Division's disappearance defies any logical explanation.

After General Kondrusev's death, the corps chief of staff, Major General Tamruchi, assumed command of the 22nd Mechanized Corps. However, "Description of the Combat Operations of the 41st Tank Division of the Southwestern Front for the Period from June 22 to 29, 1941." (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR, f. 229, on. 15 7, file 712, pp. 443–444) was, for some reason, signed by the acting commander (VRIO) of the 22nd Mechanized Corps, Colonel-Commissioner Lipodaev, and the acting chief of staff of the corps, Senior Lieutenant (!!!) Koretsky. What does all this mean? How could a senior lieutenant have ended up in the position of acting chief of staff of a mechanized corps? Where were the majors, lieutenant colonels, and actual colonels during those days?

However, let's not get bogged down in formalities and move straight to the substance.

On the very first page of the "Description of Combat Operations of the 41st Tank Division," we read:

"...At 17:00 on June 22, 1941, by order of army headquarters, a company of T-26 tanks was detached to the Dubova area to eliminate the paratroopers... ...At 17:25 on June 22, 1941, by order of Army Headquarters, a company of T-26 tanks was dispatched to eliminate the paratroopers who had landed on the Brest–Kovel highway...

...At 23:00 on June 23, 1941, a tank company from Captain Kulakov's battalion was assigned to engage eight aircraft that had landed in the Novoselka area (tanks to engage aircraft? — M.S.). After driving all night, Captain Kulakov found neither the paratroopers nor the aircraft...

...At 5:00 p.m. on June 24, 1941, on the orders of the commander of the 15th Cavalry Corps, the tank company, together with the 45th Rifle Division, attacked in the direction of Lyuboml and lost three tanks. The attack took place without infantry support..." (8).

Do you understand any of this, dear reader? The company attacked alongside the division (a mouse with an elephant), but there wasn't actually an elephant? Admittedly, the description of this same episode in Vladimirsky's monograph seems much more credible:

"...at 2:30 p.m. on June 24, the 15th Rifle Corps, using the corps reserve that had been brought into the battle: the 104th Rifle Regiment, together with the 61st Rifle Regiment of the 45th Rifle Division, supported by an armored train and a tank company from the 41st Tank Division, drove the enemy out of Lyuboml in a counterattack..."

Further on in the text of the "Description of Combat Operations," there are no mentions of combat losses of tanks, but suddenly the phrase appears: "After all these operations, only 9 tanks remained out of 116." What does "out of 116 tanks" mean?

At the start of hostilities, the 41st Tank Division had not 116 but 414 tanks (according to Vladimirsky, even more—425). Where did this entire armored armada go? Two tank battalions were (by order of the commander of the 5th Army) transferred to the 87th Rifle Division and then to the 215th Motorized Division (these are the very tanks that were not available during the 215th Motorized Division's first and last counterattacks). But even the absence of those two battalions does not explain the mysterious transformation of 414 tanks into 116, of which "9 remained"...

Let's return once more to the "Description of Combat Operations":

On June 27, the 15th Rifle Corps left Kovel and began retreating deep into Polesia. The fragmentation of the remnants of the tank division into small units continued: "On June 27, 1941, by order of the commander of the 15th Rifle Corps, a tank company was detached to cover the corps headquarters in the Kovel area, two companies in the Cherkasy area, and one company in the Dubrava area to cover the 15th Rifle Corps' withdrawal from Kovel. During the withdrawal of the 15th Tank Corps units, by order of the garrison commander (which garrison? What kind of "commander" is he for a tank division?), five KV tanks were blown up." Do you think it's easy to blow up a 52-metric-ton "steel turtle"? It would have been much easier to drain the fuel from the tanks, bury them in the ground, and use them as ready-made, powerful pillboxes invulnerable to the enemy's field artillery... Wandering through impassable forests and swamps, the remnants of the 41st Tank Division—dissolving like mist at dawn—did not rejoin the main forces of the 5th Army until the end of June.

That, in fact, is the entire brief history of the 22nd Mechanized Corps. The death of the commander, the collapse of command and control, and the disintegration of the "armored fist" into separate fragments; the death of the few remaining tank crews in the battle near Boinitsa, where, in the first and last attack on the enemy, a mere 57 combat vehicles were deployed instead of the corps' 712 tanks. "An armored, assault battalion..."

Equally baffling events were unfolding on the Radekhov front, where the 15th Mechanized Corps was supposed to counterattack the Wehrmacht's 11th Panzer Division as it advanced deep into the Soviet defenses.

The 15th Mechanized Corps consisted of three divisions: the 10th and 37th Tank Divisions and the 212th Motorized Division. Historians have access to three reports on combat operations: one covering the mechanized corps as a whole and two covering each of its tank divisions (29, p. 253; 28, p. 193; p. 217). Unfortunately, the apparent abundance of information does nothing to clarify the situation.

Not to mention that the number of tanks in the corps' divisions varies by dozens of units across different documents—even though, one would think, the authors of these reports and dispatches were not counting candy wrappers, but rather extremely expensive and "scarce" military equipment during the war. Based on the available documents, it is impossible to clarify—even in general terms—the vexing question of the 15th Mechanized Corps' staffing levels with motor vehicles and mechanized artillery tractors. Again, we are not talking about a "miracle" common to the entire Red Army, whereby, despite the presence of a huge number of motor vehicles (even BEFORE the declaration of open mobilization, each of the 303 Soviet divisions had an average of 900 motor vehicles and 112 tracked tractors and tow trucks), the mechanized corps of the first echelon of the border districts found themselves without their authorized complement of tractors, trucks, and tanker trucks. The specific figures in the reports of commanders of the same formation differ strikingly.

In total, as of June 10, 194k (i.e., even before the start of the war and the mobilization of equipment from the national economy), the 15th Mechanized Corps had 2,035 motor vehicles (of all types and purposes), 50 artillery tractors ("Voroshilovets," "Komintern," S-2), and 115 tractors (8). According to the report by the Acting Commander of the 10th Tank Division, by the start of hostilities the division had (in total, including inoperable vehicles) 962 motor vehicles and 30 tractors. A question for a second-grader: How many vehicles and tractors were "allotted" to the corps's two other divisions? Let's open the report by the acting commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps and read:

"...The 212th Motorized Division, while having nearly a full complement of Red Army personnel, had absolutely (emphasis mine—M.S.) vehicles for transporting personnel and could not even provide itself with motor transport for delivering ammunition, food, and fuel and lubricants, as well as for transporting weapons. The artillery regiment had 8 76-mm guns, 16 122-mm guns, and 4 152-mm guns, but there were only enough towing vehicles for a single battery—and even then, without any support units... The anti-tank battalion of the 212th Mechanized Division had no traction vehicles (strangely enough, but according to the report of the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps, as early as April 25, 1941, the 212th Mechanized Division was listed as having 27 "Komsomolets" tractors, 20 tractors, and 6 "Komintern" tractor-trailers.—M.S.)".

So where are the nearly one thousand vehicles and tractors "wandering" about? Perhaps they all ended up in the corps' second tank division? Nothing of the sort. • The motorized rifle regiment of the 37th Tank Division had no means of transportation. The artillery regiment of the 37th Tank Division consisted of 12 122-mm guns without panoramic sights (???), 4 152-mm guns, and a total of 5 tractors..."

According to the report by the acting corps commander, the 37th Tank Division's artillery regiment had 12 122-mm howitzers and 4 152-mm howitzers by the start of hostilities. In the report by the commander of the 37th Tank Division, however, the division's artillery strength is expressed as a percentage. One can assume this refers to percentages of the authorized strength. Specifically: "122-mm howitzers—56%, 152-mm howitzers—33.3%." 33% of the authorized number of 152-mm howitzers is, simply put, 4 guns. This figure matches the report by the acting division commander. However, 56% of the authorized number of 122-mm howitzers amounts to 6.72 howitzers. This figure does not match anything else. In particular, it does not match the subsequent text of the report by the commander of the 37th Tank Division, which states that four 122-mm howitzers were deployed on the campaign, while another 21 122-mm howitzers were left at the division's permanent base. That makes a total of 25 guns out of an unknown number of available ones...

Of course, these are all petty quibbles. The number “21” is most likely a typo. But can such facts be considered insignificant “trifles” (again, assuming these “facts” were actually true):

“...Almost all of the regimental artillery sent to the regiments was inoperable... The personnel of the corps motorcycle regiment never fired a single shot... The division did not receive any assigned vehicles from the national economy. Eight representatives were sent to the vehicle reception point in Shepetivka, but after staying there for several days, they returned without a single vehicle, stating that the vehicles intended for our division had been sent to one of the fortified areas (i.e., motor vehicles intended for a MECHANIZED unit were sent to a fortified area, which is by definition immobile. — M.S.).... Throughout the entire period of fighting, the division was unable to obtain a single shell for its 37-mm anti-aircraft guns from anywhere... They had no aerial reconnaissance data until June 25, 1941, nor did they have any thereafter... There was no air support for the division from our air force throughout the entire period of combat operations...»

As bizarre as it sounds, one of the Red Army’s most powerful mechanized corps had no armor-piercing 76-mm shells for its tank guns. Or almost none. It is difficult to say more precisely. In the report by the commander of the 10th Tank Division (63 KV tanks and 38 T-34s), we read: “For the first three days of fighting, the division did not have a single armor-piercing shell for its 76-mm guns.” In the corps commander’s report on the same subject, the situation is described somewhat differently: “During the first three days of fighting, there were no armor-piercing shells (in the 9th and 20th Tank Regiments of the 10th Tank Division, there were only 96 armor-piercing shells per regiment).”

The Red Army did indeed have a negligible number of 76-mm armor-piercing shells. This is a real, albeit logically inexplicable, fact (more than 19 million high-explosive fragmentation and anti-aircraft shells of the same 76-mm caliber had been stockpiled, while there were only 132,000 armor-piercing shells). As a result, as of May 1, 1941, there were an average of 18 armor-piercing shells per 76-mm gun in the Kyiv Special Military District (168, p. 261). On average. However, in accordance with Directive No. 0054 of the District Chief of Staff dated April 29, 1941, the available—and very modest —stock was to be distributed wisely, namely (68, p. 23):

“...Units in the district are to be supplied with armor-piercing rounds according to the following calculation:

— 6 rounds for each 76-mm gun of infantry divisions;

— 12 rounds each for cavalry and motorized rifle divisions and units in fortified areas...

— 25 rounds for each 76-mm gun mounted on KV tanks (emphasis mine—M.S.);

— 13 rounds for each T-34 tank...”

One or two dozen armor-piercing shells in a tank’s ammunition load is actually quite a lot. After all, armor-piercing shells (unlike high-explosive fragmentation shells) are not fired by the tens of thousands “into open areas.”

One or two hits from a 76-mm armor-piercing shell in the summer of ’41 were quite enough to destroy any German tank. And if the order of April 29 had been carried out by June 22, the 10th Tank Division would have had more than 2,000 76-mm armor-piercing rounds at its disposal. Theoretically, this might have been enough, if not for the entire 1st Panzer Group of the Wehrmacht, then at least for the single

German division (the 11th Panzer Division, 143 tanks) that the 10th Tank Division encountered. But it wasn't enough... Traditional Soviet historiography calls this "unpreparedness for war." They didn't have enough time. "History gave us too little time..."

Before the war, the divisions of the 15th Mechanized Corps (10th Tank Division, 37th Tank Division, 212th Motorized Division) were stationed in the Zolochiv, Kremenets, and Brody areas, respectively. As we noted above, "the 212th Motorized Division, while having almost a full complement of Red Army personnel, had absolutely no vehicles for transporting its personnel." The lack of motor vehicles (assuming such a lack actually existed) and horses turned it into a largely immobile infantry division, albeit one reinforced by a group of 37 light tanks and 17 T-37/40 amphibious tankettes: However, the 212th Motorized Division's limited mobility did not actually hinder it in any way. In accordance with an order from the front command, the 212th Motorized Division was withdrawn from the corps from the very beginning of the war and left at its permanent quarters in the town of Brody, with the task of defending this important transportation hub. Thus, without having fired a single shot, the 15th Mechanized Corps was already left with almost no infantry (only the motorized rifle regiment of the 10th Tank Division took part in the fighting on June 23–26). According to all reports, the 212th Division defended Brody until June 28, when the town was captured by German infantry without a fight. However, the memoirs of Ryabyshev and Popel indicate that they did not encounter any division in Brody at all...

Combat operations by the tank divisions of the 15th Mechanized Corps began at 9:50 a.m. on June 22, when an advance detachment of the 10th Tank Division—comprising the 3rd Battalion of the 20th Tank Regiment and the 2nd Battalion of the 10th Motorized Rifle Regiment—set out toward the border along the route Zolochiv — Radekhov. In the evening, at 10:00 p.m., the detachment encountered the enemy, "a force of up to two infantry battalions with anti-tank guns" (these were likely the advance units of the Wehrmacht's 57th Infantry Division, which had broken through the Soviet defenses in the Sokal–Krystynopol area). "As a result of the battle, six enemy anti-tank guns and up to a platoon of infantry were destroyed. Our losses amounted to two tanks. By the end of June 22, the advance detachment had occupied Radehov..." This was the first and, alas, the last success of the 10th Tank Division—and indeed of the entire 15th Mechanized Corps.

Meanwhile (at 6:00 p.m. on June 22), the main forces of the 10th and 37th Tank Divisions began advancing toward Radehov–Lopatin. Their mission was set in the most decisive terms: "to destroy the enemy's Sokal group, preventing it from retreating to the western bank of the Bug River" (i.e., on the first day of the war, the Soviet command was concerned with preventing the aggressor from fleeing back into neighboring territory).

As they began their advance, the tank regiments of the 10th Tank Division became bogged down (approximately 15–20 km from their permanent bases) in the marshes, while units of the 37th Tank Division "at 14:00 on June 23 received an order from Major General Karpezo, the newly arrived commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps, to destroy enemy tanks in the Adama area. It later turned out that there were no enemy tanks in the Adama area...".

While units of the 10th and 37th Tank Divisions were wandering through the forests and swamps, the Wehrmacht's 11th Tank Division encountered an advance detachment of the 10th Tank Division at 5:15 on June 23 on the outskirts of Radehova. A fierce, unequal battle ensued, in which the German division faced not the 15th Mechanized Corps or any of its divisions, but only two battalions lacking armor-piercing shells for their T-34 guns. "Results of the battle: 20 enemy tanks, 16 anti-tank guns, and up to a platoon of infantry were destroyed. Losses: 20 BT tanks, 6 T-34 tanks; 7 killed, 11 wounded, 32

missing in action...”

Finally, at 3:00 p.m. on June 23, two regiments of the 10th Tank Division arrived at the battlefield (the 19th Tank Regiment was still floundering in the swamp and had not yet covered the 40-kilometer distance from Brody to Radekhiv). “The attack by the motorized rifle and 20th Tank Regiments of the 10th Tank Division, without artillery support and in the face of clearly superior (???) enemy forces positioned on advantageous ground, was unsuccessful, and Radekhov remained in enemy hands. Five enemy tanks and 12 anti-tank guns were destroyed...” The commander’s report makes no mention of the division’s own losses in this battle.

This strange battle on June 23, during which Soviet tank crews were forced to chip away at the armor of enemy tanks with high-explosive fragmentation shells, turned out to be the first and only clash between the 15th Mechanized Corps and German tank units (Strictly speaking, in mid-July 1941, the remnants of the 15th Mechanized Corps—consisting of a detachment of 21 tanks and a combined motorized infantry battalion under the command of Major General Ogurtsov, commander of the 10th Tank Division—took part in a tank battle lasting several days near Berdichev). The Germans, sensing increasing pressure on the southern flank of the 1st Tank Group, withdrew from Radehiv to Berestechko (where, by the evening of June 23, they had captured the most important crossings over the Styr River) and then from Berestechko along the highway to Dubno (see Map No. 4).

Meanwhile, units of the 15th Mechanized Corps (like a boxer in the ring, dancing around before landing a punch) were making somewhat chaotic movements within the “triangle” of Radekhov–Brody–Busk. Units of the 10th and 37th Tank Divisions, continuously relieving one another at various starting lines and driven by orders from corps and front headquarters, were preparing alternately for an offensive on Berestechko, a renewed offensive on Radekhov, or to repel an attack by a nonexistent enemy that had “broken through” to Brody, and sometimes even to a retreat toward Tarpol... Although the geometric dimensions of this so-called “triangle” did not exceed 50–60 km per side, the 10th and 37th Tank Divisions clocked (according to a report from the 15th Mechanized Corps command) 10–13 motor-hours per day!

All this chaos ended at 6:00 p.m. on June 26 with a scene straight out of a horror movie.

The 15th Mechanized Corps’ combat report states: “Eighteen enemy aircraft subjected the corps command post to heavy bombing... The bombing lasted 50 minutes, resulting in 2 Red Army soldiers wounded and 1 killed.” 18 aircraft, 50 minutes of bombing, and 3 casualties? During this raid, the corps commander, Major General Ignaty Ivanovich Karpezo, was killed. His comrades immediately buried the general in the forest near the village of Toporuv. But then Ivan Vasilyevich Lutay, the deputy commander for political affairs—in simpler terms, the corps commissar—arrived at the destroyed corps command post. He arrived, listened to the report on the commander’s death—and ordered the fresh grave to be dug up.

The front-line writer V.V. Karpov, a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU during its final term and the last First Secretary of the Executive Board of the Union of Writers of the USSR, offers the following explanation for the commissar’s actions in his well-known book extolling the wisdom of “Marshal of Victory” Zhukov: Ivan Vasilyevich, they say, lost his composure from grief and began thrashing about over the grave like a hysterical young lady... It’s hard to believe such a thing. Our commissars’ backgrounds and upbringing were far too harsh to allow them to be portrayed in such a light. The haste of his subordinates apparently alarmed Lutay, and he—with a revolver in his hand rather than tears on his face—decided to personally investigate the cause of the corps commander’s

death. They dug up the grave—Karpezo was alive, though unconscious and suffering from severe concussion. Lutay's vigilance and persistence saved the general (I.I. Karpezo lived until 1987 and passed away at the age of 89), but no one was able to save the 15th Mechanized Corps from the rout toward which it was already hurtling unstoppably.

The 16th Mechanized Corps was also unable to take part in the tank battle in the Radehov–Brody–Dubno "triangle." For the first four days of the war, this mechanized corps (like the entire 12th Army as a whole) remained virtually inactive on the Hungarian border. The 16th Mechanized Corps was then transferred to the ranks of the inactive Southern Front. The fact was that the commander of the Southern Front, Tyulenev, had "discovered" as many as six nonexistent enemy tank and motorized divisions in Romania and urgently requested reinforcements. Tyulenev was a prominent figure: an Army General by rank (there were only five people in the entire Red Army holding that rank) and a former commander of the Moscow Military District. He was believed, and the 16th Mechanized Corps was sent from a passive sector of the front to an even more passive one.

Then, when the catastrophe in Belarus had become a fait accompli, on July 4, 1941, the High Command ordered the 16th Mechanized Corps to be urgently transferred by rail to the Western Front, in the Mozyr area. But the 16th Mechanized Corps was not destined to leave the southern theater of operations. Even as the redeployment was underway, on July 8, the corps was unloaded from the trains and thrown into battle in the Berdichev area, where German tanks had broken through the line of fortified areas along the old border. For several days, right up until July 15, fierce fighting raged in the Berdichev–Kazatin area, during which units of the 16th Mechanized Corps suffered heavy losses, and the corps effectively ceased to exist as a tank formation. The remnants of the 16th Mechanized Corps and its courageous commander, Corps Commander A.D. Sokolov, were killed in an encirclement "cauldron" near the city of Uman.

The advance of the second-echelon mechanized corps—Rokossovsky's 9th Mechanized Corps and Feklenko's 19th Mechanized Corps—proceeded in a somewhat more organized manner.

In the very first hours of the war, Rokossovsky, acting on his own authority, seized the regional motor transport depot in Shepetivka and loaded his 131st Motorized Division onto the trucks "captured" there. Thanks to this high-handedness, the 131st Motorized Division—despite the disruption, as was the case everywhere, of the mobilization of motor vehicles from the national economy—was able to reach Lutsk as early as June 23, outpacing both tank divisions of the 9th Mechanized Corps on the march. After that, General Potapov, commander of the 5th Army, withdrew this division from the mechanized corps ("was this done over the head of the corps commander?"—Rokossovsky remarks angrily in his memoirs) and placed it in a defensive position along the Styr River line.

This decision, although it weakened the already very limited capabilities of the understaffed 9th Mechanized Corps, proved to be correct and timely. The 131st Motorized Division then saved the day and prevented a breakthrough of the 5th Army's front, which was clearly looming on June 25 following the rout of the 22nd Mechanized and 31st Rifle Corps.

On June 24, the tank divisions of the 9th Mechanized Corps moved into the assembly area and engaged the advance units of the Wehrmacht's 13th Tank Division, which was attempting to break through to the Lutsk–Rivne highway near the village of Klevan (30 km west of Rivne). As Rokossovsky writes, "At dawn on June 24, the 20th Tank Division, with its lead regiment, launched an immediate attack on the motorized units of the German 13th Tank Division, which were resting in the Olyka area; it inflicted heavy losses on them, took prisoners, and captured a great deal of war booty... Having secured

its position, the division successfully repelled attacks by approaching enemy tank units throughout the day...". This success is all the more impressive when one considers that, prior to the start of hostilities, the 20th Tank Division had a total of only 36 (thirty-six) tanks, 30 of which were BT-5 light tanks that had been taken out of production as early as 1934. In fact, the only relatively combat-ready tank division within the 9th Mechanized Corps was the 35th Tank Division, which was armed with 142 T-26 light tanks. But even this division entered the war with a meager supply of motor vehicles and mechanized transport (188 vehicles and 7 tractors) and only half its authorized complement of artillery (4 152-mm howitzers and 6 122-mm howitzers).

Major General N.V. Feklenko, commander of the 19th Mechanized Corps, was less fortunate than Rokossovsky: there were no abandoned vehicle depots to be found in Zhytomyr or Berdichev, and the route of the 19th Mechanized Corps' upcoming advance was 100 km longer than that of Rokossovsky's corps.

Nevertheless, by the morning of June 25, the 19th Mechanized Corps—having covered more than 200 km in its extremely worn-out T-26 tanks—had reached its initial deployment area. The high pace of the march was due to the competent and proactive actions of its commander. In fact, Feklenko did exactly what the high command should have done across the entire Red Army's tank forces—reduce the excessively inflated number of mechanized units and, as a result, bring the few remaining units up to standard strength.

As Vladimirsky writes, "Before setting out on the march, each tank division of the 19th Mechanized Corps was divided into two echelons—a mobile echelon and an infantry echelon. The mobile echelons included all serviceable tanks, organized into tank regiments (one combined tank regiment per division), as well as the personnel of the motorized rifle regiment and the divisions' special units, who could be transported by available motor vehicles. The foot echelons included all remaining division personnel not provided with motorized transport, while the inoperable tanks were left at the repair base in Novograd-Volynskyi... The 213th Motorized Division, which was moving by combined march due to a shortage of motor vehicles, was closing in on the Polonne area by the morning of June 25" (i.e., it had fallen 150 km behind the corps' main forces and subsequently fought as part of General Lukin's 16th Army near Shepetivka; it did not take part in the combat operations of the 19th Mechanized Corps). Thus, the 19th Mechanized Corps (like Rokossovsky's corps) was left without motorized infantry, which further reduced its already modest combat capabilities.

The 19th Mechanized Corps was the first of all the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front to engage in a tank battle near Dubno. On the night of June 26, the advance units of the 40th and 43rd Tank Divisions reached the outskirts of Dubno, where a head-on battle ensued with the motorized infantry and tanks of the Wehrmacht's 11th Tank Division.

While giving due credit to General Feklenko's initiative, courage, and determination, we must also take into account the fact that, due to the collapse of the entire communications and command system on the Southwestern Front, the commander of the 19th Mechanized Corps went four days without receiving any orders from his superiors. It is not yet known what the situation would have been had he (like, for example, the commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps, Ryabyshev) been receiving three different orders a day...

THURSDAY, JUNE 26

It was on this very day, at 9:00 a.m., that—in accordance with a decision by the Southwestern Front

command—a counterstrike by four of the front's mechanized corps was to begin against the enemy tank group that had broken through toward Dubno. This day marked the first day of the tank battle.

Before proceeding to a detailed description of the course and outcome of this operation, we will attempt to present as accurately as possible the results of the four-day operational deployment of Soviet troops, their disposition, as well as the composition and location of enemy forces. There was no front line, in the literal sense of the word, in Western Ukraine on that day. There were separate areas of combat operations, individual defensive lines held by units of the 5th and 6th Armies that had not yet lost their combat effectiveness, as well as roads and bridges along which (often intermingled with one another) mechanized columns of Wehrmacht and Red Army tank divisions were moving.

Overall, the situation on the northern flank of Army Group South was as follows (see Map No. 4). On the right flank of the 5th Army, in the wooded and marshy region of the Ukrainian Polissya, German infantry was slowly advancing toward Kovel. In the 6th Army's defensive sector, German infantry had pushed Soviet forces back 40–50 km from the border, to a line between the towns of Yavoriv and Zholkiv (Nesterov).

On the main axis of attack, in a narrow 50-kilometer "corridor" at the junction of the 5th and 6th Armies, two enemy tank corps were advancing: the 3rd Tank Corps, consisting of the 14th and 13th Tank Divisions and the 25th Motorized Division; and the 48th Tank Corps, consisting of the 11th and 16th Tank Divisions and the 16th Motorized Division. They advanced along two virtually parallel routes: the 3rd Tank Corps toward Lutsk–Rivne, and the 48th Tank Corps toward Berestechko–Dubno. By the end of the day on June 25, the German tank columns had stretched for tens of kilometers, making it virtually impossible to pinpoint the exact location of each of the divisions listed above. The 48th Tank Corps made the greatest headway: the 11th Tank Division, advancing in the first echelon, had occupied Dubno with its main forces, while its advance units were already advancing toward Mizoch–Ostrog; while the corps' second-echelon divisions (the 16th Tank and 16th Motorized Divisions) were stretched out over 50 km along the Berestechko–Kozin–Kremenets road (see Map No. 6).

The Wehrmacht's 3rd Tank Corps, having encountered stubborn resistance from Soviet troops on the Lutsk Highway in the first days of the war, captured Lutsk on June 25 at the cost of heavy losses, but was unable to advance immediately toward Rivne. The German command then decided to "reorganize its forces" somewhat: The 14th Tank Division and the 25th Motorized Division began fighting their way northeast toward the Horyn River, in the Tsumany–Kle-van–Derazhno area, while the 13th Tank Division moved south toward Dubno, presumably with the aim of reaching the Dubno–Rivne highway (see Map No. 5).

Thus, on the morning of June 26, three of the four German tank divisions (the 13th, 11th, and 16th) were concentrated in the vicinity of the city of Dubno. By the start of hostilities, these three divisions had a total of only 438 tanks, including 139 RG-Sh tanks with 50-mm guns and 60 RKh-GU tanks. These were all the enemy forces that could theoretically have taken part in the "largest tank battle near Dubno." In reality, given the losses suffered by the Germans during the four-day offensive, they must have had even fewer combat-ready tanks remaining. As for the other tank corps (the 14th Tank Corps, consisting of the 9th Tank Division and two SS motorized divisions), which was part of the Wehrmacht's 1st Panzer Group, it was held in reserve by the group commander and had not yet crossed the Soviet border by that time—for the simplest of reasons. On June 26, Halder made the following entry in his diary: "Von Wittersheim's tank corps, which is still in reserve, cannot be moved to the front due to the extremely poor roads, which are already overloaded with supply convoys and cannot be used

to transport tanks...” (12).

What could the Southwestern Front command realistically oppose these enemy forces with?

The 22nd Mechanized Corps had already been routed, the 16th Mechanized Corps had been transferred to the Southern Front, the small and poorly manned 24th Mechanized Corps remained in the front-line reserve, and the most powerful 4th Mechanized Corps, under the command of Vlasov and Muzychenko, simply ignored the orders of the front command and withdrew from participation in the planned counterattack. Thus, on the morning of June 26, four mechanized corps—the 9th, 19th, 15th, and 8th—were available to take part in the tank battle. The wedge driven by German tank divisions from Radehiv to Dubno split the Southwestern Front’s strike force into two unequal parts: the weak “northern” (Rokossovsky’s 9th Mechanized Corps and Feklenko’s 19th Mechanized Corps) and the incomparably more powerful “southern” one (Ryabyshev’s 8th Mechanized Corps and the 15th Mechanized Corps, with the 8th Tank Division of the 4th Mechanized Corps attached to it).

Even taking into account the losses and confusion of the first days of the war, the Southwestern Front still possessed enormous forces. The “southern” strike group alone numbered more than 1,500 tanks at the start of the war. Its qualitative superiority was also indisputable: 500 of the latest KV and T-34 tanks against 200 “medium” (in every sense of the word) RG-Sh and RKh-GU tanks in the Germans’ three tank divisions.

Initially (Front Headquarters Combat Order No. 0015, issued at 21:00 on June 24), the command of the 3rd Southern Front planned to launch a counteroffensive on the morning of June 25, but, having ascertained that the 8th Mechanized Corps and the 8th Tank Division of the 4th Mechanized Corps would not even have time to reach their assembly area (not to mention the time required for reconnaissance of the terrain and the enemy), it postponed the start of the counterattack until the morning of June 26. Front Headquarters Combat Order No. 0016 read: “1. By the evening of June 25, 1941, the enemy had concentrated up to two or three tank divisions and one motorized division in the Radzehuv area.

The main task of the troops on the right flank of the Southwestern Front is to crush the enemy’s Radzehuv group on June 26, 1941.

2. The main strike against the enemy’s mechanized group is to be delivered by the 8th and 15th Mechanized Corps—the latter together with the 8th Tank Division—in accordance with the tasks assigned to these formations by Order No. 0015 dated June 25, 1941. Take up the starting positions for the attack by 4:30 a.m. on June 26, 1941. The attack is to begin at 9:00 a.m. on June 26, 1941.

The Front’s Air Forces are to begin bombing enemy tank concentrations at 4:00 a.m. with the aim of maximizing suppression by the start of the attack. The attack is to be preceded and supported by powerful air strikes.

3. Major General Potapov, Commander of the 5th Army, is to place the 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps under his command and have them occupy the starting line for the attack on the front line between Grudek and Rymno (both points 8 km southwest of Lutsk) with the aim of assisting the 8th and 15th Mechanized Corps in crushing the Radzekhuv group through an attack along the railroad (Lutsk, Brody). Occupy the starting line by 4:30 a.m. on June 26, 1941. The attack is to begin at 9:00 a.m. on June 26, 1941.

4. Indicate the tanks' position with a series of red flares. Air force identification signal: a left-wing roll" (29, p. 28).

Order No. 0016 could not have been carried out even in theory: the enemy's tank group had already left the Radekhov area and moved east toward Dubno and beyond. The specified starting line for the attack by the "northern" group (Grudek–Rymno, southwest of Lutsk) had been occupied by the enemy a day earlier; as for the 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps, they were still only moving into the area of Rivne (i.e., they were located 60–80 km east of the starting area designated for them). As a result, instead of the attack from the south and north in the general direction of Berestechko as stipulated in Orders Nos. 0015 and 0016, the "southern" group attempted to advance from Brody toward Berestechko, while the "northern" group attempted to advance from Rivne toward Dubno.

This discrepancy alone made it difficult to coordinate the "southern" and "northern" groups. In reality, however, there was no coordination at all.

Judging by documents from the mechanized corps command and the postwar memoirs of the surviving generals, the command of the 3rd Southern Front did not even inform the commanders of the plans and actions of their neighboring units. For example, the former commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps, General Ryabyshev, writes that it was only in the afternoon of June 27 (the twenty-seventh) that "the chief of the front's armored and tank forces, Major General R. N. Morgunov, arrived at the corps command post."

He reported that the 9th Mechanized Corps under Major General K. K. Rokossovsky was to launch a counterattack against the enemy from the northeast toward Dubno from the Klevan area, and the 19th Mechanized Corps under Major General N. V. Feklenko—from the Rivne area.

This information came as a surprise to me. General Morgunov then left for the 15th Mechanized Corps, and no further orders followed from him..." (113).

In the report on the combat operations of the 43rd Tank Division (19th Mechanized Corps), we read:

"...throughout the entire march, right up until June 26, 1941, the division headquarters received no information from higher headquarters regarding the situation at the front." So what changed after June 26? We read further: "...the division headquarters had no data on the enemy or the actions of our units on the front; our air force also provided nothing to help assess the situation..." (28, pp. 236, 237).

V.S. Arkhipov, twice Hero of the Soviet Union—who in those days was commander of the reconnaissance battalion of the 43rd Tank Division—writes in his memoirs:

"...when, on the evening of June 26... our division reached Dubno, none of us knew that General D.I. Ryabyshev's 8th Mechanized Corps was successfully advancing toward us from the south... A similar situation repeated itself the next day, when we and our neighbors, the infantrymen of the 36th Corps, reached the outskirts of Dubno, but did not know that Colonel I.V. Vasilyev's 34th Tank Division from the 8th Mechanized Corps had already stormed into the city..." (109).

In Marshal Rokossovsky's memoirs, we read:

"...No one had been tasked with coordinating the actions of the three corps. They were thrown into battle separately and on the fly... Based on scattered reports, we were able to gauge to some extent what

was happening in our sector. We did not know how things were going in the sectors of the other armies of the Southwestern Front. Apparently, General Potapov was not in a better position. During the entire time I commanded the 9th Mechanized Corps, his staff was never once able to assist us in this regard...” (111).

To this we must add that all commanders, in all their reports, unanimously speak of the complete lack of any coordination with the air force, which not only failed to “support the attack with powerful air strikes,” but also failed to provide the advancing tank units with fighter cover and reconnaissance information. It is simply impossible to find a reasonable explanation for this, since the air force of the 3rd Army Group had nearly a thousand aircraft as of June 24 (190). Where were they? Where were they flying? What task could have been more important during those days than supporting the offensive of the front’s strike tank group?

Let us return, however, to a chronological account of events.

Early in the morning of June 26, the 43rd Tank Division of the 19th Mechanized Corps set out for battle from the area south of Rivne (see Map No. 5). Unfortunately, the mysterious “tank losses” did not spare this division, which had covered itself with undying glory during those tragic days: of the 237 tanks available before the start of hostilities, a combined tank group consisting of 2 KV tanks, 2 T-34 tanks, and 75 T-26 tanks.

We learn how events unfolded from a surviving report by Colonel I.G. Tsibin, commander of the 43rd Tank Division:

“...the command of the 43rd Division halted the retreating infantry and artillery of the 228th Rifle Division, positioned them, and ordered them to engage the enemy alongside the tank division. After restoring the necessary order, the decision was made to launch an immediate attack...

The division’s artillery (43rd Artillery Regiment), moving under tractor tow at a speed of 6 km per hour, was still en route and could not open fire by the start of the attack. The division had not been allocated a single aircraft sortie, so the division headquarters was unable to obtain any information about what was happening deep within the enemy’s defenses, while the enemy air force continued to dominate the skies, directing fire and monitoring our movements...

At 14:00, the division’s tanks launched their attack, led by two KV tanks and two T-34 tanks; they immediately turned around and, with a barrage of fire, disrupted the enemy’s anti-tank defenses and the battle formation of the enemy infantry, which began to retreat in disarray toward the west. While pursuing the enemy infantry, our tanks came under fire from enemy tanks—some from ambushes and others from their positions—but the KV and T-34 tanks that had broken through to the front (of which there were only four in this division. — M.S.) attacked the enemy tanks, followed by the T-26 tanks...

Unable to withstand the fire and the rapid tank attack, the enemy tanks began to retreat, lingering on the flanks, but were quickly driven out by our tanks maneuvering across the battlefield. The KV and T-34 tanks, lacking a sufficient supply of 76-mm armor-piercing shells, fired high-explosive fragmentation shells and, using their sheer mass, crushed and destroyed the enemy tanks and anti-tank guns...

The battle lasted about 4 hours... The enemy, retreating toward Dubno, blew up the bridges behind them, thereby depriving the division of the opportunity to break through to Dubno on the heels of its retreating infantry...” (28, pp. 237–239).

Perhaps with some exaggeration, but the commander of the 43rd Tank Division's reconnaissance battalion, V.S. Arkhipov (who entered the war already holding the rank of Hero of the Soviet Union and ended it as a twice-decorated Hero), describes that day much more vividly. In his memoirs, he writes:

"...when, on the evening of June 26, we were driving the fascists toward Dubno, it was no longer a retreat but a full-fledged rout. The units of the 11th Tank Division were in disarray; panic had gripped them. This was evident in the fact that, in addition to hundreds of prisoners, we captured many tanks and armored personnel carriers, as well as about 100 motorcycles abandoned by their crews in working condition. As they approached Dubno, already at dusk, the tank crews of the 86th Regiment noticed that eight German medium tanks had attached themselves to the rear of their column—apparently mistaking them for their own. Their crews surrendered along with their vehicles at the very first demand from our comrades. The prisoners, as a rule, were quick to declare that they did not belong to the National Socialists and were very willing to give testimony. It was a very, very long time before I again witnessed such a psychological state among Hitler's troops—depression and panic—only after Stalingrad and the Battle of Kursk..." (109).

Of course, no miracle occurred. Tsibin's division, which even before the battle had effectively been reduced to a light tank battalion, was unable to capture Dubno or rout the two enemy tank divisions (the 11th and 13th) that had been concentrated there. The offensive by the 40th Tank Division of the 19th Mechanized Corps was even less successful. This division was "tank" in name only—of its 158 combat vehicles, 139 were T-37 light tankettes armed with machine guns (the division had only just begun to form, and the machine-gun tankettes were being used as training and combat vehicles). North of Dubno, along the Ikva River line, the 40th Tank Division was routed in a head-on battle with units of the Wehrmacht's 13th Tank Division and 111th Infantry Division. The 9th Mechanized Corps, advancing from the north (more precisely, its two understaffed divisions lacking artillery and motorized infantry), was also unable to provide much assistance. In the heat of battle on June 26, Rokossovsky's corps was unable to break through the defenses of the Wehrmacht's 299th Infantry Division and link up with the 40th Tank Division of the 19th Mechanized Corps.

Over the next two days, the situation for the "northern" group of Soviet forces deteriorated significantly. The Germans, having brought up the 14th Panzer Division and the 25th Motorized Division from the Lutsk area, launched their own offensive from Dubno toward Rivne and on toward the Horyn River. Rokossovsky recalls:

"...having driven with a group of staff officers to a high ground near the positions of the 20th Tank Division's frontline units, I observed a massive column of enemy vehicles, tanks, and artillery moving from Dubno toward Rivne.

And German units kept coming and coming toward our defensive line from the south..."

After heavy fighting, by June 28 the remnants of the 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps had been pushed back 40–70 km from Dubno, to the Klevan–Tuchyn–Hoshcha area, where they entrenched themselves along the banks of the Horyn River. The city of Rivne—the administrative center and an important transportation hub of Western Ukraine—was captured by the enemy. Nevertheless, the soldiers and commanders under Rokossovsky and Feknenko fulfilled their part of the overall mission: the small and poorly armed "northern" group drew the fire of three of the four tank divisions of the Wehrmacht's 3rd and 48th Corps, thereby greatly easing the situation for the much more powerful "southern" group. Figuratively speaking, the desperate attack by the 19th and 9th Mechanized Corps forced the Germans

to turn toward the northwest, thereby exposing their virtually unprotected rear to the onslaught of the massive tank “sledgehammer” formed by the 15th and 8th Mechanized Corps.

Most likely, the Germans did not realize this at the time. It is strange and regrettable that the Red Army commanders, it seems, were unaware of either the actual balance of forces or the full advantage of their position. Here is how Popel, the commissar of the 8th Mechanized Corps, describes in his memoirs the meeting that took place at corps headquarters on the eve of the offensive:

“...Tomorrow we will occupy the starting area and, in coordination with Karpez’s corps (15th Mechanized Corps), launch a flanking attack against the enemy group, which, according to intelligence, consists of five tank (???) and four mechanized divisions... I did a quick calculation on a scrap of paper—five tank and four mechanized divisions—that’s roughly two thousand (???) tanks... The Germans’ numerical and technical superiority (???) forced us...” Etc.

The phrase about the “Germans’ technical superiority,” alas, is no accident. Here is another excerpt from Popel’s memoirs:

“...The Germans had the bridge under fire, and a shell struck a tank crossing it head-on... But as if nothing had happened, it veered to the right and headed toward us. It turns out that the Germans’ anti-tank guns can’t penetrate frontal armor. A useful discovery. It boosts the morale of our men...” (105).

A useful discovery??? The Soviet Union had already purchased this very same 37-mm anti-tank gun from Germany back in the 1930s! Moreover, when it became clear during range tests that the actual armor penetration was lower than claimed, a major scandal erupted (it turned out that Soviet standards for assessing armor penetration were significantly stricter than the German ones) (87). So why, then, did Tevosyan’s commission tour all the German tank factories in 1940? Why was the best German tank of the time, the Pz.KpF-III, purchased, and why was it put through its paces at the Kubinka test range? Where did the results of these tests end up—tests during which every single specification, right down to noise levels, was stripped from the “troika”? It turns out that all these reports, adorned with the menacing stamp “top secret,” simply lay gathering dust in safes?

After the 8th Mechanized Corps was forced to spend four days on pointless marches, the front command demanded an immediate offensive. The choice of the direction of the attack (from Brod to Berestechko) is strange, to say the least. Even on a modern map of Ukraine’s highways, not a single decent road can be found between these cities. The terrain is covered with forest and crisscrossed by numerous small streams. Yet the main highway runs from Brody to Dubno through completely open terrain—not a single “green” spot on the map...

The corps was forced to launch its attack without reconnaissance, without any serious intelligence on the enemy, and without artillery preparation. Not a single squadron from the promised air division ever appeared in the sky by the end of the day. In fact, the two infantry divisions (the 139th and 141st) deployed to the left of the mechanized corps’ offensive line, as Popel writes, “had not even heard a whisper about the corps’ offensive. And they could have been of great help.” The neighbor on the left—the 15th Mechanized Corps—continued its frantic maneuvers through the forest in the Busk–Toporuv area and never launched an attack on June 26. It was on the evening of June 26 that the horrific incident occurred in which the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps was buried alive, after which the corps lost its combat effectiveness for the entire following day (the 15th Mechanized Corps did not begin its advance on Berestechko until noon on June 28). The 8th Tank Division of the 4th Mechanized Corps, transferred to the operational command of the 15th Mechanized Corps, was still crawling at an

average speed of 20 km per day from Lviv to Busk and took no part in the counterattack on June 26...

And yet—"there's no defense against a wreck." Despite the utterly shoddy preparation and organization of the offensive, even acting alone, the 8th Mechanized Corps achieved some success on June 26.

Major General T.A. Mishanin's 12th Tank Division, supported by artillery and motorized infantry, crossed the marshy terrain and, by 11:00 a.m., had crossed the Slonovka River. By 4:00 p.m., in a fierce battle, the division's 24th Tank Regiment captured the village of Leshnev (20 km north of Brod). The first tank battle also took place near Leshnev, after which—as Popel's memoirs indicate—the few surviving German tanks were forced to flee: "The Germans faltered and, under cover of an RG-IV platoon, took to their heels. They fled openly, helplessly, cowardly... Our KV tanks stunned the Nazis..."

In the document (Report of the Commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps on the Corps' combat operations from June 22 to 29, 1941), the events of June 26 are described in much more restrained terms:

"...The corps attacked the defending units of the enemy's 16th Armored Division in the general direction of Brody, Berestechko, and Boremel, but, encountering organized resistance from the enemy —who were sheltered by a marshy river impassable to tanks and had destroyed all crossings over that river—it was unable to maintain the pace of the offensive.

Units of the 12th Tank Division, while attacking the enemy, crossed the Slonovka River and advanced into the area of the enemy's artillery positions, capturing the heights north of Leshnyuv by the end of the day and destroying three enemy batteries and four tanks in the process.

In this battle, the 12th Tank Division suffered heavy losses in personnel and equipment: 8 tanks were destroyed in action, 2 tanks became bogged down in a swamp, and, in addition, enemy aircraft destroyed all the artillery regiment's tractors and most of the gun crews.

By the end of the day, the 34th Tank Division had captured the area of Khotyn, Redkiv, and Komorivka, destroying 3 batteries and 2 motorcycle battalions in the process, and seizing two battalion headquarters and 4 enemy tanks... In this battle, the 34th Tank Division lost five tanks, four of which were disabled by the enemy and one of which burned... (28, p. 167).

Be that as it may, the corps was advancing, and less than 20 km remained to Berestechko. It would seem that just a little more—and the emerging success could be turned into a breakthrough on an operational scale. And these were by no means amateurish pipe dreams. General Ryabyshev writes in his postwar memoirs:

"...The situation for the 8th Mechanized Corps was developing favorably. The German force was not deployed in a continuous line but in separate sectors; its troops were scattered along the roads. In contrast, the units of the 8th Mechanized Corps occupied advantageous positions on the flanks and in the rear of the enemy divisions... When I sent a report on the corps' successful operations to the front headquarters, I assumed that the commander would decide to build on the corps' success, rout the enemy, and drive him back to the border (emphasis added by me—M.S.)" (113).

It is also worth noting the encouraging fact that this success was achieved at the cost of minimal losses of military equipment (compared to the initial strength): the 12th Tank Division lost 8 tanks in battle,

with two more bogged down in the swamps; the 34th Tank Division's losses amounted to only 5 tanks. Now all that remained was to finally elicit active action from the 15th Mechanized Corps, which was floundering in the forests; to coordinate with the infantry and artillery; to provide air cover for the advancing columns—and then only a miracle could have saved the Germans from defeat.

Miracles do happen sometimes. More often than not, people make them happen themselves. Remember how books about ancient times describe it: the criminal places his head on the block, the executioner swings his axe—and just then a messenger gallops in with a decree from "our good king" granting a pardon... Something similar happened on the night of June 26–27, 1941.

COMMANDER

According to N.K. Popel's account, events unfolded as follows:

"...Oksen (the corps counterintelligence chief) burst into the dugout (the command post of Colonel Vasilyev's 34th Tank Division). Barely having greeted me, and without apologizing—which was uncharacteristic of this level-headed, invariably polite intelligence officer—he approached me,

— Six Red Army soldiers have been detained in the division's rear. They claim that Mishanin's division (the 12th Tank Division) is retreating rapidly, and that two generals have surrendered... They swear they saw the division's retreat with their own eyes, and they know about the generals' capture from what they've been told. If they are to be believed, the division is retreating in a mass formation through the forest toward the south..."

Attempts to establish radio contact with either the corps headquarters or the command post of Mishanin's tank division failed. The radios were silent. Deeply alarmed, Popel rushed in a T-34 tank through the coniferous forest—still smoldering after repeated bombings—toward Brody. But in the forest on the eastern outskirts of the city, at the spot where the corps headquarters had been located that afternoon, there was no one left: "Not a soul. Empty dugouts. The wind lazily scatters scraps of paper..." Soon, the car of Major Petrenko, the corps' deputy chief of intelligence, pulled into a forest clearing. He also confirmed the veracity of the incredible reports:

"...Mishanin's division has withdrawn from the front line... We ran into some of its soldiers several times along the way. They're wandering aimlessly. No commanders in sight... They claim that General Mishanin ordered a retreat to Brody, while he himself, along with the corps commander, surrendered..."

This book is a documentary historical study, so we won't keep the reader in suspense any longer—especially since nothing mysterious actually happened. No X-rays, no German paratroopers, no earthquakes in a swampy forest—just the 8th Mechanized Corps once again caught in the "shock wave" of yet another insane order from the Southwestern Front command.

Marshal Baghramyan proudly writes in his memoirs that "not a trace of confusion was felt at the front headquarters"!

Let's not argue. We'll take his word for it. There was no confusion. But everything else—communications, intelligence, reliable information about the status of their own troops and those of the enemy, firmness and consistency in decision-making—was also missing. On the evening of June 26, based on panic-stricken rumors (which, like lice on a concentration camp prisoner, inevitably spread in the rear of a demoralized army), the Southwestern Front headquarters concluded that the counterattack

launched that morning had already ended in failure. Operational Report No. 09 of the Southwestern Front Headquarters, dated June 26, 1941, stated: “At 9:00 a.m. on June 26, the 8th Mechanized Corps indecisively attacked enemy mechanized units from the Brody area and was halted by the enemy in the starting (???) area for the attack...” (29, p. 30).

Even this assessment of the situation, made at the very moment when the 19th and 8th Mechanized Corps (unfortunately, without direct communication with one another) were advancing on Dubno and Berestechko, was completely out of touch with reality. Well, the decision made on the basis of such an assessment was downright strange. “The chief of staff of the front took the floor,” Baghramyan recalls. “His idea boiled down to this: the 36th and 37th Rifle Corps, advancing from the rear, should be deployed along the Dubno–Kremenets–Zolochiv line with the task of holding back the enemy through tenacious defense. The mechanized corps were to be withdrawn behind this line” (110).

Where is the logic here? Where is the trace of common sense? Even if we assume that the front’s mechanized corps—which still had 1,500 tanks at that time—proved incapable of crushing or at least halting the enemy’s advance, what grounds were there for hoping that two rifle corps would be able to handle such a task? Did the front headquarters really not yet know that the infantry divisions—staffed largely by conscripts from the western regions of Ukraine—were fleeing in droves after the very first shots were fired? And how could the order to “withdraw behind this line” be given when there was not even a trace of an equipped defensive line along the Kremenen–Zolochiv axis, and the infantry of the 36th and 37th Rifle Corps had only just begun to move into that area?

It is noteworthy that G.K. Zhukov (Chief of the General Staff and Plenipotentiary Representative of the Supreme Command on the Southwestern Front) explicitly warned against such a decision.

“...upon learning that Kirponos intended to deploy the 36th and 37th Rifle Corps, which were advancing from the rear, in a defensive position along the Dubno–Kremenets–Novy Pochaev line, he strongly opposed such a use of the front’s second echelon troops:

— ‘If we’re going to strike, then with all our might!

...Before flying to Moscow on June 26, G.K. Zhukov once again demanded that Kirponos muster everything possible for a decisive counterattack...” (PO).

The complete futility of the decision made on the evening of June 26 (which Baghramyan, even in his postwar memoirs, unashamedly calls “the operational decision best suited to the changed situation”) became apparent not after a few days, but after just a few hours—on the morning of June 27.

Let us continue reading Baghramyan’s memoirs:

“...No sooner had we received reports that the 8th and 15th Mechanized Corps had returned to their previous positions than news swept through headquarters: Nazi tanks were rushing toward Ostrog. There was alarm at front headquarters (but not a trace of confusion. — M.S.)... Colonel Bondarev reported excitedly that today (June 27. — M.S.) at dawn, the 11th German Tank Division had made a rapid advance from the Dubno area. Having pushed back the units of the right-flank division of the 36th Rifle Corps that were on the march to the south, it is now advancing almost unhindered toward Ostrog...”

So much for the “defensive” line held by the 11th Rifle Corps!

But even before the German tank units launched their offensive eastward from the battlefield near Dubno, Moscow had already reacted to the Southwestern Front command's report. On the night of June 26–27, the "BODO" high-frequency telegraph communication system went into operation at the Southwestern Front headquarters. Baghramyan recalls:

"...I run into the communications room, grab the telegraph tape, and read: 'General Malandin (Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army—M.S.) is at the telegraph. Hello. Report immediately to the commander that the High Command has forbidden a retreat and demands that the counterattack continue. Do not give the aggressor a moment's peace. No."

I hurried to Kirponos. After listening to my report, he quietly cursed..."

The quiet curse of the high command reverberated deafeningly through the troops.

At dawn on June 27, Popel finally found the headquarters of his mechanized corps on the southern outskirts of Brod:

"...we saw the corps commander standing by the side of a KV tank. Ryabyshev was pacing back and forth beside the tank, without stopping, as if on autopilot. I'd seen the corps commander in all sorts of ways, but never like this... Ryabyshev, barely nodding to me, took a piece of paper folded in half from his breast pocket:

— Take a look.

The slip contained a few lines written in calligraphic clerical handwriting. The letters were rounded, with uniform thickness, pressed close together, and slanted to the right. "The 37th Rifle Corps is defending the Nov. Pochaev–Podkamen–Zolochiv front. The 8th Mechanized Corps is to withdraw behind the 37th Rifle Corps' line and reinforce its battle formation with its own firepower. Commence the withdrawal immediately."

Below was the signature: "Commander of the Southwestern Front, Colonel General Kirponos." And above the parentheses—a sweeping, upward-curving flourish...

A passenger car was approaching from the south. It stopped nearby. A familiar colonel from the front headquarters got out. Unshaven, his eyes red from sleepless nights, he greeted us curtly and handed Ryabyshev an envelope. Dmitry Ivanovich tore off the wax seal, and we saw the same round letters, wearily slanting to the right, and the same signature—that flourish. Only the text was completely different: the corps was to advance from the Brody area toward Verba–Dubno starting in the morning and capture Dubno by evening.

Ryabyshev stared at the colonel in bewilderment:

"What about the previous order?"

The colonel was not inclined to engage in discussion:

"As you know, the latest one is being carried out..." (105).

It is hard to believe all this, but the story of the two orders with directly contradictory content, received on the morning of June 27, is generally corroborated by the documents. In the aforementioned “Report of the Commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps on the Corps’ Combat Operations,” we read:

“...At 2:30 a.m. on June 27, 1941, Major General Panyukhov arrived at the headquarters of the 8th Mechanized Corps and conveyed to the commander the following verbal order (emphasis mine—M.S.) from the commander of the Southwestern Front:

“The 37th Rifle Corps is defending the front line at Po-Chaev Iovy, Podkamen, and Zolochiv. The 8th Mechanized Corps is to withdraw behind the infantry line of the 37th Rifle Corps and reinforce its battle formation with its own firepower. Begin the withdrawal immediately.”

...At 6:00 a.m. on June 27, 1941, in the area 2 km south of Brody, via Brigade Commissar Mikhailov, the second order from the Commander of the Southwestern Front, No. 2121, dated June 27, 1941, was received regarding the offensive of the 8th Mechanized Corps beginning at 9:00 a.m. on June 27, 1941, in the direction of Brody, the town of Verba, and Dubno...” (28, p. 167).

In the combat report of the 15th Mechanized Corps (signed by Acting Corps Commander Colonel Yermolayev), the events are described as follows:

"...June 27, 1941. Based on an order from the Southwestern Front (which clearly mistakenly cites the number of another order and an entirely implausible date—June 29. — M.S.), orders were issued to withdraw to the Zolochiv Heights, behind the defensive line of the 37th Rifle Corps, in order to reorganize.

The commander of the 75th Mechanized Corps issued a written order to the corps’ units to withdraw...

Arriving at around 10:00 a.m. at the command post of the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps in the forest near Kashteľany, the head of the Political Propaganda Directorate of the Southwestern Front, Brigade Commissar Mikhailov, on behalf of the Front’s Military Council, once again transmitted the order for the corps to advance in the direction of Berestechko...” (29, p. 261).

As we can see, Popel made a mistake in his memoirs only regarding the military rank of the person who delivered the order to resume the offensive (for some reason replacing Brigade Commissar Mikhailov with “an acquaintance, a colonel from the front headquarters”). It is not entirely clear whether the order to retreat was conveyed verbally or whether there was, in fact, a written order with a “scribbled signature”... In any case, it is high time to interrupt our account of the tragic events of June 1941 in order to get to know the man who had the right to place his signature next to the words “Commander of the Southwestern Front.”

People who knew General Kirponos personally speak of him in different ways.

Marshal K.S. Moskalenko writes about him warmly and respectfully:

“...He was a man well-versed in military matters and proved himself a brave and resolute commander during the war with the White Finns... This brave, courageous general perished amid severe trials, leaving behind a kind and bright memory in the hearts of those who knew him...”

Commissioner Popel offers a more ambiguous assessment of the commander: “...An impeccably brave

and resolute man, he is not yet ready for such a post. We have discussed this among ourselves more than once, speaking calmly, not seeing any great danger in this during peacetime, forgetting that the border district will turn into a front once hostilities begin...”

Marshal Rokossovsky describes his meeting with the commander of the 3rd Army in very harsh terms:

“...I was extremely surprised by his strikingly obvious confusion... He tried to feign calm, but he failed. He listened to my brief report on the situation in the sector of the 5th Army and Corps either distractedly or frequently interrupted me, rushing to the window and exclaiming: ‘What is the air defense doing? Planes are flying, and no one is shooting them down. This is outrageous!’

...Yes, it was confusion, because in the situation that had developed by that time, another front commander, in my opinion, would not have had time to worry about air defense... It seemed as though he either did not know the situation or did not want to know it. In those moments, I finally came to the conclusion that this man was not up to such extensive, complex, and responsible duties, and woe to the troops entrusted to him...”

Mikhail Petrovich Kirponos was killed on September 20, 1941, while attempting to break out of the encirclement east of Kyiv. Whatever the circumstances of his death may have been (there are three versions: death in battle, suicide, or that the Chekists carried out a secret order from Stalin to prevent the capture of the front’s senior command), General Kirponos gave his life for his homeland, and this fact compels the author to exercise the utmost restraint in his assessments. Let us give General Kirponos the opportunity to speak for himself—fortunately, we have at our disposal an autobiography he wrote on October 21, 1938 (187). We present it here with very minor abridgments and brief comments:

“I was born on January 9, 1892, in the town of Verkievka, Chernihiv Governorate, into the family of a poor peasant. The household had less than ten sytinas of land, a hut, and nothing else. My father worked for a long time as a tea server in a teahouse (what kind of ‘peasant’ is that?) in our town... He began attending the parish school in 1899. In 1900, he transferred to the zemstvo school in the same town... General education: I completed the third grade at the zemstvo school and, in 1903, enrolled in a two-year technical school and the Borzen School of Horticulture, but was unable to continue my studies there due to my parents’ difficult financial situation...

In December 1909, I began working as a forest ranger in the Korovyakovskoye Forest District; in 1912, I was transferred to the Mikhailovskoye Forest District as a forest nursery supervisor (working in forest nurseries) with a salary of 12 rubles per month. I served in that forest district until September 1915, that is, until I was mobilized into the tsarist army. I served in the 216th Reserve Infantry Regiment... In May 1917, I graduated from medical assistant school (meaning I took virtually no part in the combat operations of World War I).

I was on the Romanian front from August 1917 to February 1918 in the 258th Regiment as a company medic... During the October Revolution, I agitated among the soldiers in favor of Bolshevism. There, I was elected chairman of the regimental committee and a member of the divisional revolutionary committee...

Upon my return from the Romanian front, I took the initiative to organize Red partisan detachments to fight the counterrevolution... In September 1918, I fled from Ukraine to the territory of the RSFSR, where I joined the ranks of the 1st Soviet Division of the Ukrainian Insurgent Forces... I held the

following positions: deputy division commander, chairman of the revolutionary tribunal, and commander of the 2nd Bohun Regiment...

On July 1, 1919, by order of Comrade Shchors, he was appointed assistant head of the School of Red Commanders in Zhytomyr... Due to illness, he transferred to non-combat duties at the same school—as secretary to the school's military commissar...

In May 1920, he was assigned to the 2nd Kyiv School of Red Commanders, where he held positions ranging from commander of the guard unit to school commissar.

From the 23rd to the 27th of the year, he studied at the Frunze Military Academy of the Red Army. In January 1931, he was appointed chief of staff of the 51st Rifle Division in Odessa; in April 1934, he was transferred from that post to become commander of the Kazan Infantry School, where he continues to serve today.

Social work: During the struggle against the opposition, I was actively involved in exposing and removing "Ukapists" from the Kharkiv School of Red Non-Commissioned Officers, maintaining close ties with the Cheka. While studying at the Military Academy, I exposed the anti-Party nature of the oppositionists during classes. In 1927, I exposed political instructor Polischuk as a Trotskyist. As a result of his exposure, other Trotskyists were also identified... At the Kazan Infantry School, I took an active part in exposing the enemies of the people Gobasov, Yusupov, Obryvaev, Pavlovsky, and others... In 1937, on my initiative, the deputy chairman of the Zelenodolsk City Council was brought to trial and convicted for criminal misconduct in compiling voter lists...

I have never had, nor do I have, any hesitations or deviations from the Party's general line.

In 1937, I received a Party disciplinary action—a reprimand not recorded in my personal file—for failing to notice cheating during the second-level GTO fitness tests...

I married in 1911 a citizen (as stated in the text!) named Olimpiada Vasilievna Polyakova (the daughter of a shoemaker), and divorced her in 1919. After the divorce, I raised our daughters... I married for the second time in 1919 to Sofya Alexandrovna Piotrovskaya. I have three daughters from my second wife. My wife was born in Zhytomyr and is of Polish nationality. Her father worked as a janitor at the State Bank; they lived in extreme poverty the entire time. Before the revolution, my wife's father worked as a waiter in restaurants, and her mother prepared home-cooked meals without hiring help. My wife's brother, Jan Piotrowski, left for Poland in 1924 or 1925; neither I nor my wife know where he is or what he is doing there...

In 1930, my wife's father was exiled from Zhytomyr to Alma-Ata, where his wife and daughter Rosalia had already moved... My wife considers herself to have no father, mother, brother, or sister, and has never taken an interest in their fate. Neither I nor my wife know why her father was exiled, but my wife understands that her father obviously deserved it, and therefore has never shown—and does not show—any pity for him..."

Such is his biography. A man of the utmost modesty in his aspirations (he worked as a forester from age 17 to 23), raised in a family of rural lumpen-proletariat. He never had any desire for military service and evaded the front lines of World War I as best he could. A caring father and faithful husband—anyone else in his place would have quickly divorced the daughter of a repressed Pole. He washed away the "stain" on his personal file through the most zealous cooperation with the repressive

authorities. The peak of his career was three years as chief of staff of a division. Before and after that, he held non-combat positions ranging from quartermaster to head of an infantry school in a provincial backwater. The mention of his studies at the Frunze Military Academy should not mislead us—what and how were students taught at this so-called "academy" if the students were people with incomplete elementary education? In essence, it was a closed, "elite" literacy program in which semi-literate "handpicked candidates" were barely brought up to the level of a seven-year secondary school.

Everything is relative. To enable the reader to properly assess the biography of the commander of the Southwestern Front, we will also provide brief information about Field Marshal Rundstedt, commander of the German Army Group South.

He was 17 years older than Kirponos, born in 1875 into the family of a Prussian army general. He graduated from the military academy in Oranienstein and was promoted to second lieutenant in 1893. In 1907, he graduated from the Military Academy. During World War I, he served as an officer on the General Staff, then as chief of staff of the 53rd Army Corps on the Eastern Front, and by the end of the war, as chief of staff of the 15th Corps in France. For his combat merits and personal bravery, he was awarded the Knight's Crosses of the 1st and 2nd Classes and the Order of the House of Hohenzollern. After Germany's defeat, he remained in service with the Reichswehr. In late 1932, Rundstedt was appointed commander of the 1st Army Group in Berlin. In November 1938, he retired after speaking out against the occupation of the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia (it is interesting to wonder what would have happened to a Soviet general who, for example, spoke out against the "liberation" of Western Ukraine?).

In May 1939, he returned to active duty in the Wehrmacht. During the invasion of Poland, he commanded Army Group South, which captured Warsaw. During the French Campaign, Rundstedt commanded Army Group "A," which broke through the front near Sedan and surrounded the main Allied forces at Dunkirk. After the victory in France, he was awarded the highest military rank in Germany: Field Marshal.

The appointment of a commander of this caliber to lead one of the Wehrmacht's three Army Groups on the Eastern Front seems understandable and logical. But how did the former head of the Kazan Infantry School end up as his opponent?

The war was to blame for everything—the Finnish War. The head of the infantry school was drafted into the active army and became commander of the 70th Rifle Division. In the final days of the war, Kirponos's division carried out a feat—a terrible, bloody, and utterly senseless one. Under the terms of the peace treaty, the city of Vyborg (Viipuri) was to be ceded to the USSR. Nevertheless, Stalin and Tymoshenko ordered the city to be taken by storm without waiting for the day or hour of the ceasefire. The 70th Rifle Division was tasked with encircling the city across the ice of the Gulf of Finland and "cutting off the retreat routes of the Finnish troops surrounded in the city" (even though the order and timing of the Finnish troops' withdrawal were being negotiated in Moscow at that very moment). Naturally, the Finns did not deny themselves the pleasure of teaching the overconfident aggressor a lesson. Shells from the heavy guns of the coastal batteries smashed through huge ice floes; both living and dead Red Army soldiers vanished into the icy water. Division Commander Kirponos strode courageously at the head of the attacking ranks—in short, Comrade Stalin could have been thoroughly satisfied with the obedience of his subjects.

A deluge of awards, ranks, and new appointments rained down on those who had managed to bring such pleasure to the leader. First-Rank Army Commander Timoshenko became a marshal and People's

Commissar of Defense of the USSR; the commander of the 7th Army, which had stormed the "Mannerheim Line," Second-Rank Army Commander Meretskov, became an army general and Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army. Kirponos's personal bravery was not forgotten either—he received the Gold Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union and was appointed commander of the 49th Rifle Corps.

Comrade Stalin might have stopped there—but no, he had taken a particular liking to the modest and courageous newly promoted Major General Kirponos. In June 1940, having leaped several rungs up the career ladder at once, the former head of the Kazan Infantry School was appointed to the position of… commander of reconnaissance for the Leningrad Military District! But even that seemed insufficient! In February 1941, Stalin appointed G.K. Zhukov as Chief of the General Staff, and on February 22, 1941, Kirponos took over the vacant post of commander of the Kiev Military District—the largest military district in the Soviet Union. Kirponos, who received his third promotion in nine months (he became a colonel general). Neither England nor the United States possessed on that day a ground force of the size that this World War I company medic—who had been deemed fit only for non-combat duty as early as 1920—was about to command.

"And woe to the troops entrusted to him..."

The front command, which now (on the morning of June 27) had to demonstrate to the General Staff its readiness "not to give the aggressor a moment's peace," did not give the 8th Mechanized Corps a single day to calmly regroup and deploy to new starting lines. And the corps sorely needed this.

First, both the direction and the depth of the upcoming offensive had changed significantly. Admittedly, the change made sense: a highway runs from Brody to Dubno, with a railroad embankment running parallel to it; the terrain is open and well-suited for a tank offensive. But to reach that road, the corps' tank divisions still had to make their way out of the forest massif near Leshnyuv–Khotyn. The distance from Brody to Dubno is 62 km by highway, and it is doubtful that such a "task for the day" was realistic for a mechanized corps whose units, as a result of the confusion caused by the front command's conflicting orders, had ended up scattered over dozens of kilometers.

The 12th Tank Division carried out the nighttime order to withdraw with surprising speed; in some cases, the withdrawal turned into a disorderly rout. The state of disarray in the division had reached such a point that the division commander, General Mishanin—who had been severely concussed during a bombing raid—was simply dragged into an abandoned tank and left alone in Brody, under the "supervision" of an orderly who was equally concussed (105). The corps commander's report states:

"...At the time the order from the Southwestern Front was received, the 12th Tank Division was on the move from Brody to Podkamen; its column was stretched out over a depth of 20–25 km. At the behest of a delegate from the corps headquarters, half of the 12th Tank Division's column of combat vehicles was immediately turned around; consisting of 25 heavy and medium tanks, it was dispatched at 10:00 on June 27, 1941, as an advance detachment in the direction of Kozin, Verba, and Dubno with the task of capturing Dubno...

...Following this detachment, at 14:00 on June 27, 1941, the 34th Tank Division (150–156 tanks, a motorized rifle regiment, and an artillery regiment) was committed with the mission of capturing the Dubno area by the end of the day...

...Following the 34th Tank Division, at 17:00 on June 27, 1941, the following units departed from the

Chervonoarmeysk area: • units of the 23rd and 24th Tank Regiments of the 12th Tank Division (up to 30 tanks) set out from the Chervonoarmeysk area at 17:00 on June 27, 1941, toward the town of Verba to conduct joint operations with the 34th Tank Division. By the end of June 27, 1941, these units had joined up with the 34th Tank Division.

The remaining units of the 12th Tank Division were in the Podkamen area throughout June 27, 1941, where they reorganized and, by the end of the day (emphasis mine—M.S.), concentrated in the forests northeast of Brody...” (28, p. 168).

Thus, on June 27, the corps was split (as became clear a few days later—split forever) into two parts. The strike group under the command of Corps Commissar Popel, consisting of the 34th Tank Division and separate tank groups from the 12th Tank Division (a total of about 220 tanks and up to 9,000 personnel), moved along the highway toward Dubno. The rest of the corps’ units (the main forces of the 12th Tank Division, the 7th Motorized Division, and corps units) under Ryabyshev’s command concentrated in the Brody area throughout the day on June 27. It is important to note that the majority of the new-model tanks (about 100 KV and T-34 tanks) were assigned to Ryabyshev’s group; Popel’s group likely included no more than 8 KV tanks from the 34th Tank Division and about 40 T-34 and KV tanks transferred from the 12th Tank Division.

By the evening of June 27, Popel’s group, having routed several scattered units of German troops along the way, reached the southern suburbs of Dubno. In his memoirs, Popel writes:

“...The enemy infantry battalion and tank company defending the village of Granovka were taken by surprise. German soldiers rushed to their guns, tanks, and trenches in nothing but their underwear—they were sunbathing. Volkov dealt with the enemy blocking force so quickly that the main forces didn’t even have to slow down...Our motorcyclists were riding across the entire width of the highway. To their right, tanks with their guns pointed to the left were moving along the railroad tracks. When I saw this sprawling avalanche from the hill, I felt that special joy that comes from the awareness of one’s own strength...”

On the morning of June 28, Popel’s group encountered units of the Wehrmacht’s 111th Infantry Division, which had taken up defensive positions in the suburbs of Dubno. During intense fighting, Soviet tank crews advanced another 10 km and captured the village of Sady Maly on the southern outskirts of Dubno. They never managed to enter the city itself (although a report from the Southwestern Front headquarters, sent at 22:00 on June 28 to the General Staff of the Red Army, stated that “as of 14:00 on June 28, 1941, the 8th Mechanized Corps had occupied Dubno”) (29, p. 44). In any case, the crucial transportation hub through which supplies for the Wehrmacht’s 1st Panzer Group passed was paralyzed, and a powerful Soviet tank formation appeared in the rear of the German divisions that had retreated east of the Ikva River line.

TWO COMMISSARS

In the preceding pages of this book, many (perhaps too many, as some readers might say) critical remarks have been made about the Red Army of 1941. It is time to recall that the enemy was exceptionally strong, and no army in the world could have prevailed against it at that time. The Wehrmacht’s strength lay, of course, not in “multiple numerical superiority”—which was nowhere to be found—and certainly not in the “technical superiority” of the frail German tanks.

Its strength lay elsewhere: in the shared conviction—from the general down to the private—of their

invincibility, of their superiority over any enemy, and in the unyielding resolve of the command and the steadfastness of the troops. It must be noted that the breakthrough of the Soviet tank wedge into the rear of the Wehrmacht's main strike force did not cause even a hint of confusion among the German generals. The panicked cry, "We are surrounded!"—never rang out. On the afternoon of June 28, the Chief of the General Staff of the Army, F. Halder, coolly noted in his diary:

"...In the sector of Army Group South, the 8th Russian Tank Corps is advancing from Brody toward Dubno into the rear of our 11th and 16th Tank Divisions. We must hope that in doing so, it is heading toward its own destruction..."

Three of the four tank divisions of the Wehrmacht's 1st Tank Group continued their steady advance eastward. Having broken out of the trap near Dubno, the 11th Tank Division captured Ostroh as early as June 27, crossed the Horyn River, and moved along the highway toward Shepetivka—a crucial railway junction in Left-Bank Ukraine. The divisions of the Wehrmacht's 3rd Panzer Corps (the 13th and 14th Panzer Divisions, 25th Motorized), advancing northeast from Dubno, had captured Rivne by the end of the day on June 28 and reached the Horyn River the very next day in the Hoshcha–Tuchyn sector (see Map No. 5).

One must admit that the German command found the most correct solution, one that precisely matched the situation: the German tank divisions escaped imminent defeat by FLEEING.

Yes, that is exactly what happened. There was no tank battle near Dubno (similar to the Battle of Prokhorovka in June 1943). The German tanks "fled the battlefield"—only they did not flee backward, but forward, to the east, deep into the rear of the Southwestern Front. And to contain the Soviet tank breakthrough at Dubno, the German command hastily pulled four infantry divisions (the 111th, 44th, 75th, and 57th) from other sectors of the front, as well as part of the forces of the 16th Panzer Division and the 16th Motorized Division from the 48th Panzer Corps. As a side note, the very fact that German infantry appeared 120 km from the border as early as the fifth or sixth day of the war clearly demonstrates the true nature of the Soviet troops' "fierce resistance." For infantry marching on foot, 20 km a day is a marching pace—and a forced march at that. It is noteworthy that in October 1939, precisely in these areas—in occupied Eastern Poland—a schedule for the movement of marching columns (20 km per day) was established to withdraw German and Soviet troops to the agreed-upon line of the new border (1, p. 130). At such a pace, the German infantry simply would not have had time to fight and overcome "fierce resistance"...

Of course, if the Wehrmacht had faced an organized, disciplined, capable, and battle-ready army in June 1941, such a decision by the command would have led to the destruction of German troops in Ukraine. The infantry thrown in front of the tanks would have been routed, and the tank units, cut off from their supply lines, would have driven themselves into a trap where they would have perished without fuel or ammunition. But the German generals had already realized (or intuitively sensed) who they were dealing with. The panic that gripped the troops and the command of the Southwestern Front after the German vanguard units broke through to Ostrog turned out to be the most effective weapon, far more powerful than the small-caliber guns of the German tanks...

First and foremost, the command of the Southwestern Front obtained approval from the Supreme Command to use units of General Lukin's 16th Army—which had arrived from the Far East in the first days of the war to the Proskuriv (Khmelnytskyi)–Izyaslav–Shepetivka area—to counter the German offensive. Indeed, the German invasion threw all prewar plans into disarray, and as early as June 26, 1941, the 16th Army had been ordered to be transferred to the Western Front near Smolensk, but thanks

to the energetic and decisive actions of Army Commander Lukin, the 109th Motorized Division and the 114th Tank Regiment of the 57th Separate Tank Division were pulled from loading and moved toward Ostrog. Lukin then attached the 213th Motorized Division of the 19th Mechanized Corps to his group; as the attentive reader will recall, due to a lack of motorized transport, this division had been marching on foot from Kazatin westward toward Rivne, which was already occupied by the Germans. Overall, Lukin's group outnumbered the opposing 11th Panzer Division of the Wehrmacht by at least two to one.

In addition, most of the front's air force was deployed to combat the German tanks that had broken through to Ostroh; according to a report from the Air Force Headquarters of the 3rd Army, in just one day—June 28—it carried out 400 sorties in the Ostroh–Mizoch area (152, p. 200). 400 sorties, 400 bombing runs against a single division's column in a single day—this fully corresponds to the phrases constantly appearing in Red Army commanders' reports stating that "the enemy's air force is constantly in the air, even chasing individual vehicles..."

An August report by the commander of the Air Force of the 3rd Army Group states that the front's air force "during the period of June 28–29, through the actions of our bombers in coordination with the troops of the Shepetivka fortified area, pushed back and scattered an enemy tank group (up to a division in strength) from Ostrog to the south" (29, p. 118). Driven back and scattered... However, according to German data, the P Tank Division's irretrievable losses even by September 4 amounted to only 40 tanks (10, p. 206).

In addition, the command of the 3rd Army ordered the establishment of a "defensive cut-off line" along the Vishnevets–Bazalia–Starokostyantyniv line, i.e., 60–70 km south of the route taken by the German 11th Tank Division. The front's last reserves were deployed to this line: the 24th Mechanized Corps (222 light tanks), three anti-tank artillery brigades, and the 199th Rifle Division. These units remained at the designated line without any contact with the enemy, who had no intention of turning south but was rushing straight eastward, deep into the rear of the Southwestern Front.

Furthermore (as Baghramyan writes in his memoirs), <the High Command decided—presumably on the basis of panicked reports pouring in from the headquarters of the Southwestern Front in Moscow—that the front, on its own, "would be unable to hold back the avalanche of Nazi tanks" (by the start of the fighting, the 11th Tank Division had only 143 tanks). On June 29, Zhukov emphasized in a telephone conversation with Kirponos that "High Command demands that primary attention be paid to developments on the Shepetivka sector... To this end, Lukin's tank units in their entirety (the 13th and 17th Tank Divisions, the 115th Tank Regiment of the 57th Tank Division—at least 900 tanks. — M.S.) must be thrown at Zdolbuniv–Mizoch" (PO). It is unlikely that the German command—which had made a desperate bluff by sending the badly battered 11th Tank Division on a "daring cavalry raid" into the rear of the Soviet forces—had actually expected such an outcome...

Amid all this commotion, the 8th and 15th Mechanized Corps were most likely simply forgotten. In any case, it's better not to dwell on what was happening there.

After all the confusion caused by the changing orders, and after days of wandering through the forested area between Radekhov, Brody, and Busk, the 15th Mechanized Corps launched an offensive on the morning of June 28. By that time, the enemy tanks had already retreated far to the east from Berestechko, and the 15th Mechanized Corps, advancing in the direction of Busk–Lopatin, could only encounter isolated units of the Wehrmacht's 297th and 262nd Infantry Divisions (see Map No. 6).

The account of the battle on June 28 in the final report by the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps is preceded by a long list of reasons why the strike by the armored fist—which still comprised more than three hundred tanks—was “doomed to failure.” In particular:

“...Terrain. In the corps’ offensive sector up to Berestechko, there are five major water obstacles: the Radostka River, the Ostruvka River, the Zhechka River, the Loshuvka River, and the Sokoluvka River. All the rivers have marshy banks and present difficult-to-cross obstacles for tanks. The entire terrain along the advance route is wooded and marshy, with commanding heights on the enemy’s side. Conclusion: the terrain is not conducive to an offensive...”

There is no disputing this conclusion. The only question that remains is: across what kind of terrain did the divisions of the Wehrmacht’s 1st Panzer Group advance? How were they able to cross these mighty forest streams (Radostavka, Ostruvka, Zhechka, Loshuvka, and Sokoluvka)—which are not marked on any geographical map—as well as the Western Bug, the Styr, the Goryn, the Sluch, and further on, the Dnieper? And where did these “command heights” appear in the swampy forest, and why were they in the hands of an enemy who had appeared in that forest only a few days (or even hours) earlier?

However, by signing such a report, the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps was merely following the “general trend” of complaints about the terrain and the formidable enemy, as had already been dictated by his superiors. Thus, as early as July 3, 1941, the chief of the Southwestern Front’s Motorized and Armored Directorate, in a report addressed to the chief of the Red Army’s Main Motorized and Armored Directorate, attributed the “enormous losses and the combat ineffectiveness of the remaining equipment” by the fact that the mechanized corps had to operate in “almost impassable wooded and marshy terrain,” under conditions of “stubborn resistance from a superior (???) enemy and a lack of armor-piercing shells for the KV and G-34” (28, p. 134). This last observation is undoubtedly true. But who was supposed to ensure that at least a small portion of the 132,000 76-mm armor-piercing rounds available in the Red Army’s depots was delivered to the military district that received tanks armed with 76-mm guns (KV and T-34), in greater numbers than all the other districts combined? How could the chief of the Armament and Technical Department of the Kiev Military District eat, drink, sleep, and fulfill his marital and professional duties, knowing that the tank divisions entrusted to him lacked armor-piercing shells? Or did he only learn of this on July 1?

The descriptions of the battle on June 28, contained in the reports of the commanders of the 15th Mechanized Corps, the 10th, and the 37th Tank Divisions, are very lengthy, confusing, and contradictory. The briefest summary looks something like this:

"...Throughout the day, units fought to capture Lopatin... The advancing units of the 10th Tank Division were halted in front of the peat bogs, in the vicinity of which the only road proved completely impassable for tanks... During the battle for Lopatin, near the Ostruvka River, the advancing units were surrounded (the tank division was surrounded by enemy infantry. — M.S.). It was pointless (???) for the 10th Tank Division to remain in this area overnight while surrounded, and could have led to the loss of the entire division...

....Having suffered significant losses and lacking sufficient tank support (???), the motorized rifle regiment of the 37th Tank Division was forced to halt its advance and go on the defensive on the western bank of the Styr River... Due to a temporary loss of command, the 73rd Tank Regiment of the 37th Tank Division was only with great difficulty able to cross to the west bank of the Styr River... This allowed the remnants of the enemy battalion defending the crossings near Stanislavchik (an infantry battalion against a tank division. — M.S.) to retreat into the forest.... An attempt to cross the bridges

over the Ostruvka River was unsuccessful, as the lead 2–3 tanks that approached the bridge were immediately destroyed and burst into flames. Several tanks tried to bypass the bridge on the right and left, but this proved impossible; the tanks got stuck in the swamp and were destroyed by enemy artillery fire... Given this situation, it was clear that continuing the attack without artillery, infantry, or air support would be pointless; at the same time, remaining at the line they had reached on the southern bank of the Ostruvka River was also risky...

...As darkness fell, the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps issued an order to withdraw units of the 10th Tank Division eastward to the area of the 37th Tank Division, and subsequently, in connection with the already completed (???) withdrawal of the 37th Tank Division from combat—an order to withdraw from combat and return to their starting positions..."

It is hard to believe that all this took place on their own territory, in the area of the 15th Mechanized Corps' permanent pre-war deployment—that is, where every road, path, ditch, ford, and bridge should have been thoroughly studied. It is hard to believe that what we have here is a description of combat operations by a mechanized corps that included pontoon-bridge, sapper, engineering, repair-and-evacuation, and reconnaissance units. As of June 1, 1941, each tank in the 15th Mechanized Corps was supported by 45 personnel. Of these 45 people, at most five crew members were inside the tank (three in a BT tank). All the others were supposed to support the tankers' combat operations with reconnaissance, repairs, fuel, ammunition, bridges, crossings, and, most importantly, command and control...

In the battle on June 28, the 8th Tank Division of the 4th Mechanized Corps operated alongside the 15th Mechanized Corps. The 8th Tank Division was a virtually fully manned, "veteran" career division. A notable feature of the 8th Tank Division was that it was armed with 68 T-28 triple-turret tanks, which made this division a formidable opponent for the German infantry. However, the division's main weapons were not the exotic triple-turret tanks, but rather 50 KV tanks and 140 T-34s. In terms of the number of the latest tanks (190 units), the 8th Tank Division surpassed the entire 15th (or 8th) Mechanized Corps. Here is how N.K. Popel describes the commander of this tank division:

"I look at him and am in awe—nature has spared nothing for this man: neither beauty, nor intelligence, nor courage, nor charm... Red Army soldiers tell legends about his exploits in Spain and Finland... Commanders hang on his every word..."

By the time the 8th Tank Division finally reached the initial area of the offensive, all that remained of the entire division was a single combined tank regiment, armed with 65 (sixty-five) tanks (29, p. 260). The combat report of the 15th Mechanized Corps notes that "thanks to the active actions of the 8th Tank Division, the corps' left flank was secured from the west, and the 10th and 37th Tank Divisions will be able to withdraw to the Radostavka River line." This is not a typo. The result of the tank division's "active operations" during the offensive is considered to be that, with its help, the other two tank divisions were able to retreat safely while being pursued by enemy infantry. However, even this achievement is by no means indisputable. For example, the combat report of the 10th Tank Division states the exact opposite: "The division's retreat routes were cut off by enemy tanks and infantry, since the 8th Tank Division (to its left), which was tasked with covering the division's operations from the west, was unable to advance through a heavily fortified anti-tank zone" (28, p. 197). ^ This is strange. It is the sixth day of the war—and the Germans already have an anti-tank zone ready deep within Soviet territory, and one that is even "heavily fortified"...

The main forces of the 8th Mechanized Corps, despite having a powerful tank assault force (in addition

to the two hundred light tanks in the 12th Tank Division, there were still about 100 KV and T-34 tanks), were unable to break through the defenses of the 75th Infantry Division and the motorized infantry units of the 16th German Tank Division. The tenacity and resilience of the German soldiers proved stronger than steel armor. A German historian describes the battle with Soviet tanks south of Dubno as follows:

"...Tarnovka shook from the explosions of anti-tank grenades; houses were ablaze; every available weapon was directed at destroying the tanks. The wind carried smoke and the smell of burning all around. A single heavy infantry gun (a 150-mm short-barreled gun—M.S.) managed to knock out two medium tanks. The 50-mm anti-tank guns were useless even at a range of 400 meters. More and more of these steel colossi rolled into Tarnovka, but the soldiers of the 16th Tank Division held their ground with dignity. A single 88-mm anti-aircraft gun destroyed four tanks in half an hour.

When the attack was repelled, the dead and wounded were recovered, and the smoke cleared, 22 disabled tanks could be counted on the battlefield..." (193).

Ryabyshev's group never managed to advance beyond the Kozin–Verba line. Meanwhile, the Germans redeployed tank units of the 16th Panzer Division from Kremenets to the battle area and brought in motorized infantry from the 16th Motorized Division. The 57th Infantry Division advanced into the rear of Ryabyshev's group and, with virtually no fighting, captured the town of Brody (which was supposedly being defended by the 212th Motorized Division of the 15th Mechanized Corps). By the evening of June 28, the units of the 8th Mechanized Corps found themselves surrounded. Panic broke out once again. General Mishanin was killed while leading his troops on foot into the attack. In his report on the corps' combat operations, Ryabyshev writes:

"...Units of the 7th Motorized Rifle Division were breaking out of the encirclement in various directions. Having lost a large number of tanks, artillery pieces, and motor vehicles, by 24:00 on June 28, 1941, the division broke out of the encirclement and regrouped southeast of Brody" (28, p. 169).

Popel's memoirs provide a much more vivid picture of what lay behind the terse phrase "broke out of the encirclement in various directions."

"...Ryabyshev got into an 'M' and raced toward Brody. Along the way, he came across crowds of soldiers wandering aimlessly, burning vehicles, and wounded soldiers lying in the ditches (emphasis mine—M.S.). The line assigned to the 12th Tank Division was unoccupied... Some disoriented Red Army soldiers said that the motorized infantry had headed south, apparently toward Ternopil. The corps commander turned onto the southern highway and, after about twenty kilometers, caught up with the rear of the stretched-out column. Pikto knew nothing about it. Ryabyshev tried to stop the vehicles. From the cab of a "one-and-a-half," a sleepy voice calmly said:

"What corps commander are you talking about? Our general is a traitor. He defected to the fascists."

Ryabyshev yanked the cab handle, grabbed the speaker by his belt (rank-and-file soldiers don't wear belts. — M.S.), and dragged him outside.

"I am your corps commander."

Without holstering his pistol, Ryabyshev moved along the column, halting companies and battalions, ordering them to take up defensive positions facing northwest..." (105).

After the disorderly retreat of the remnants of the 8th Mechanized Corps toward Brody–Podkamen, Popel's group was doomed: cut off from communications and supplies, the tank group was being encircled ever more tightly by units of five German divisions. Two infantry divisions (the 140th and 146th) of the 36th Army Corps were located 15–20 km from Dubno, but, contrary to Front Commander's Order No. 0018 of June 28, they provided no support to Popel's group. A convoy of trucks carrying fuel and ammunition for Popel's group was stopped on the Brody–Dubno highway. It was halted by the commander of a retreating cavalry division who happened to be there (most likely the 3rd Cavalry Division from the 6th Army) and sent back, since "Dubno has long been in German hands." No one wanted to argue with this; the trucks turned around and hurriedly drove back to the rear...

Most likely, another personal tragedy—the suicide of N.N. Vashugin, a member of the Military Council of the Southwestern Front—is linked to the tragic story of the 8th Mechanized Corps' destruction. It is difficult (if not impossible) to reconstruct the exact sequence of events. Let's begin with an excerpt from the memoirs of N.S. Khrushchev, who was both a witness to the suicide and a direct participant in the events (as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Khrushchev was a member of the front's Military Council):

"...I would like to shed light on an episode that was unpleasant for us, involving a member of the Military Council of the Kyiv Military District.

When we faced difficult conditions in the Brody area, the commander of the forces and I took measures to regroup our troops and refine the direction of our strike against the enemy forces advancing on Brody. To ensure that this order was received in a timely manner by Mechanized Corps Commander Ryabyshev and the commander of another corps, whose name I have forgotten (judging by the previous description, this refers to the 15th Mechanized Corps. — M.S.), we decided to send a member of the KOVO Military Council to personally deliver the orders specifying the direction of the attack. Before leaving for the mechanized corps, he stopped by my place that evening...

The member of the Military Council (Khrushchev stubbornly refuses to mention Vashugin by name. — M.S.) left for the troops, but returned early in the morning and came to see me again. He looked terribly agitated; something had upset him immensely.

He came at a moment when no one else was in the room—everyone had left—and told me that he had decided to shoot himself.

I said, "Come on, what are you talking about? Why are you saying such nonsense?"

"It's my fault that I gave the wrong orders to the commanders of the mechanized corps. I don't want to live."

I continued, "Wait a minute—how can that be? Did you actually issue those orders?"

"Yes, I did."

"But the orders clearly state how they are to act and use the mechanized corps. What does this have to do with you?"

“No, I later gave them verbal instructions that contradicted those orders.”

I say: “You had no right to do that. But even if you did give such instructions, the corps commanders still had no right to follow them; they were required to carry out the instructions set forth in the orders and signed by the front commander and all members of the Military Council. Other instructions are not valid for corps commanders.”

“No, I was there…”

In short, I could see that he was trying to pick a fight with me—one with no basis in fact—and that he himself was in some kind of state of shock. I thought that if I didn’t try to reason with this man but instead dealt with him more sternly, it would snap him out of his state of shock; he would find his inner strength and return to a normal state. So I said, “What nonsense are you talking about? If you’ve decided to shoot yourself, why are you hesitating?” I wanted to stop him with some sharp words, so that he would realize he was committing a crime against himself. But then he suddenly pulled out a gun (the two of us were standing face to face), put it to his temple, fired, and fell... They loaded him into a car and took him to the hospital, but he died there shortly afterward...

...I can’t say for sure what his state of mind was at the time. It’s clear that he was nervous. Then he came to me and shot himself. However, before that, he spoke with people who were in direct contact with him, and they heard what he said. He believed that everything was lost, that we were retreating, and that everything was going the way it had in France. “We’re doomed!”—those were his exact words... Then I wrote a coded message to Stalin, describing our conversation. There is a document that I am now reproducing from memory. I think I am recounting it accurately, except perhaps for the order of the events. As for the very essence of it, I am describing it exactly as it happened back then...” (31, pp. 306–307).

Khrushchev does not specify the exact date of this grim event, nor do his memoirs contain any concrete details that would allow us to pinpoint the time of the incident. There is only a mention that Vashugin left in the evening and returned to front headquarters “early in the morning.” This is an important detail, but, unfortunately, not very reliable—given the passage of time, Khrushchev may well have erred on such points. Most importantly, there is no explanation of the content of the “other instructions” that Vashugin allegedly gave to the commanders of the mechanized corps. Alas, the part most important to a historian has been replaced by an ellipsis (“no, I was there…”).

The memoirs of Baghramyan, Ryabyshev, and Popel (and, based on them, numerous historical and fictional works) assert that Vashugin set out for the 8th Mechanized Corps on the morning of June 27 (the twenty-seventh) with the aim of hastening the start of the offensive on Dubno. Accordingly, the commissar’s excessive zeal explains why the corps launched the offensive hastily, with separate, scattered units. This scene is most vividly described by Popel (or, more likely, by his “literary consultants”):

“...The doors of the trucks were slamming open. Before us appeared ‘more and more new faces’—colonels, lieutenant colonels. I recognized some of them—the prosecutor, the chairman of the Military Tribunal... Soldiers were jumping out of the bed of the one-and-a-half-ton truck bringing up the rear of the column.

The man the corps commander was addressing refused to listen to the report; he did not raise his hand to his temple. He walked straight toward Ryabyshev, his polished boots trampling the underbrush.

When he drew near, he looked up at the corps commander’s wrinkled, high-cheekboned face and asked in a voice strained with rage:

“How much did you sell yourself for, Judas?”

Ryabyshev stood at attention before the member of the Military Council, taken aback, at a loss for words, and all of us looked bewildered at the short, well-built corps commissar.

Dmitry Ivanovich spoke first:

“You should hear him out, Comrade Corps Commissar...” ^

“You, traitor, will face a field court-martial. Here, under this pine tree, we’ll hear your case, and we’ll shoot you right here by the pine tree...”

I couldn’t hold back any longer and stepped forward:

“It remains to be seen what considerations guide those who, by order, force us to surrender territory we’ve captured in battle to the enemy.”

A barely perceptible note of confusion crept into the voice of the member of the Military Council:

“Who ordered you to surrender the territory? What are you babbling about?”

Dmitry Ivanovich reports. The member of the Military Council paces back and forth in front of us, his hands clasped behind his back; he glances at his watch and orders Dmitry Ivanovich:

“Report your decision to me in twenty minutes....”

The corps commissar gave us no time for reconnaissance or for regrouping the divisions. How were we supposed to advance? Ryabyshev stands up and walks over to the corps commissar, who is pacing alone.

“The corps won’t be able to complete its regrouping until tomorrow morning.”

The member of the Military Council, seething with indignation, says in a near-whisper:

“A decision in twenty minutes—and then we move forward...”

Despite its undoubted literary merits, this passage is not very psychologically credible.

It is unclear what exactly provoked such wild fury in Vashugin (“How much did you sell yourself for… you traitor, a court-martial will hear your case…”). A member of the Front’s Military Council (who, moreover, had been at the front headquarters continuously prior to this) could not have been unaware of the order to withdraw, which had reached the mechanized corps early in the morning of June 27. Thus, the phrase “Who ordered you to surrender the territory?” seems completely absurd. Vashugin was a career military officer (and by no means a party functionary who had received his commissar position and rank only a few weeks before the war); accordingly, he could not have failed to understand that tanks do not fly and that it is impossible to turn a mechanized corps around in a couple of hours. Of

course, there could have been complaints that Ryabyshev was not acting as quickly as one might have liked—but that is still no reason to accuse him of treason. Finally, “fast” and “slow” are relative concepts. If we recall the pace at which the 8th Tank Division was moving toward the battlefield, Ryabyshev’s corps deserved praise rather than blame for its masterful organization of forced marches...

Let us now move from psychological nuances to the dry prose of the documents. Even greater surprises await us here. There are no mentions of Vashugin’s visit in the reports of the commanders of the 8th and 15th Mechanized Corps (whereas the fact of Major General Panyukhov’s arrival with an order to retreat, and subsequently—Brigade Commissar Mikhailov’s arrival with an order to advance, specifically indicating the hours and minutes—is noted in the documents of the 8th and 15th Mechanized Corps).

Furthermore, Ryabyshev issued the order to immediately launch an offensive on Dubno at 7 (seven) o’clock in the morning, by no means waiting for the arrival of a high-ranking “enforcer.” In his “Report on the Corps’ Combat Operations,” we read:

“...In accordance with Order No. 2121 of the Southwestern Front, the corps commander issued the following combat order at 7:00 a.m. on June 27, 1941:

“The 34th Tank Division is to advance in the direction of Kozin, the town of Verba, and Dubno and, by the end of June 27, 1941, reach the Dubno area...

The 12th Tank Division is to advance in the direction of Sitno, Koshi, and the town of Verba and, by the end of June 27, 1941, reach the area of Podluzhe, the town of Verba, and Sudobiche.

The 7th Motorized Rifle Division, advancing in the direction of Brody, Chervonoarmeysk, and the town of Verba, is to concentrate in the area of (omitted) the town of Verba, Rudnya, and Bereg by the end of June 27, 1941...

The offensive was to begin at 9:00 a.m. on June 27, 1941.”

It is noteworthy that in his postwar memoirs, Ryabyshev paints a completely different picture of events:

“...I came to the conclusion that we could begin carrying out the new order only in a day’s time (emphasis mine—M.S.)... The corps’ formations and units were to cross the starting line for the offensive at 2:00 a.m. on June 28 and begin the attack at 4:00 a.m... Preparations were carried out in accordance with the decision that had been made... However, the rapidly changing situation did not allow for the systematic resolution of issues related to the organization of combat operations. On the afternoon of June 26 (this is clearly a typographical error—either by Ryabyshev, the “literary consultants,” or the publisher, since on the “afternoon of June 26” the 8th Mechanized Corps was advancing on Leshned–Khotyn, and there was not yet any mention of the two orders or the offensive on Dubno. — M.S.) Corps Commissar N.P. Vashugin, a member of the Front’s Military Council, arrived at the corps and, on behalf of the commander, demanded that they immediately begin carrying out the assigned task...” (113).

Nevertheless, the event (Vashugin’s meeting with the commander of the 8th Mechanized Corps), which four participants in the events (Khrushchev, Baghramyan, Ryabyshev, and Popel) describe independently of one another, most likely actually took place. As a working hypothesis, we can assume that it took place not on June 27, but on June 28, 1941. In that case, many things “fall into place.”

On the night of June 27–28 (to be precise, at 4:00 a.m. on June 28), Combat Order No. 0018 (29, pp. 37–38) was issued at the headquarters of the 3rd Southern Front. Not only was this order written in the strongest possible terms and set the task of launching an offensive for both the mechanized and infantry corps of the front—Order No. 0018 also contained, for the first time, specific instructions regarding where the corps headquarters were to be located by the end of the day on June 28! Both the form and content of the order indicated that the front command's patience had run out, and it demanded that the commanders under its authority personally lead the offensive. Thus, by the end of the day on June 28, the headquarters of the 15th Mechanized Corps was to move to Berestechko, the headquarters of the 36th Rifle Corps to Dubno, and the headquarters of the 5th Cavalry Corps to Kozin. The 8th Mechanized Corps was ordered "to secure the line along the Ikva River and attack the enemy's motorized and mechanized units operating east of the Ikva River in the direction of Ost-Rug. After destroying the enemy, it was to concentrate by the end of the day in Zdolbuniv, Mizoch, and Ozhenin. The corps headquarters was to be located in Ozhenin (a village and railroad station on the Horyn River, 15 km north of Ostroh. — M.S.)." (See Map No. 5). In other words, the 8th Mechanized Corps, which had in fact only just begun the battle for Dubno, was to cross the Ikva River within the day and advance 40–50 km toward Ostrog.

Order No. 0018 bears Vashugin's signature—and this is the last (!) order he signed. Given that Order No. 0018 set forth very ambitious (if not outright reckless) objectives, the personal visit to the troops by a member of the Military Council (i.e., the Chief Commissioner) of the front becomes entirely understandable. Vashugin's psychological reaction to what he saw upon arriving at the 8th Mechanized Corps' positions on the morning of June 28 (the twenty-eighth) also becomes understandable: a powerful tank formation was bogged down in front of a hastily erected German infantry barrier, and then fled altogether, abandoning their comrades (Popel's group)—who were already surrounded in the southern suburbs of Dubno—to certain death. Something unbelievable was unfolding before Commissar Vashugin's eyes: hordes of former Red Army soldiers wandering aimlessly, hundreds of tanks and artillery pieces abandoned on the roadside, and the wounded left lying in roadside ditches... Probably, at that moment, the thoughts and feelings of this man—who had sincerely believed in the Party, Stalin, and the "indomitable might of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army"—coalesced into a single short phrase: "I don't want to live..."

DEFEAT

From the morning of June 29, the 15th Mechanized Corps was "withdrawn to the front-line reserve," which in practice meant a nonstop retreat toward the Dnieper. A brief phrase in the 15th Mechanized Corps' combat report eloquently illustrates the situation during those days: "…The highway east of Zolochiv is completely clogged with burning vehicles from countless convoys…"

The report from the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps states that during a day of "fierce" fighting on June 28, the 10th Tank Division lost seven men: one killed and six wounded. One might be tempted to take comfort in the fact that by the end of June 1941, the Red Army had already learned to fight with "minimal casualties." Alas, further on in the reports, figures appear that completely dampen any desire to rejoice. For example, during the fighting from June 23 to 28 and the subsequent retreat across the Dnieper, the 10th Tank Division lost 210 men killed, 587 wounded, and 3,353 "missing in action," "left behind on the march," and so on. However, even in terms of casualty rates, General Ogurtsov's division confirmed its reputation as one of the best. After all, 756 senior officers, 1,052 junior commanders, and 3,445 enlisted men reached Pyriatyn (beyond the Dnieper)—a total of 56% of the division's initial strength (as of June 22). The subsequent fate of Sergei Yakovlevich Ogurtsov

himself was tragic. During fierce fighting near Berdichev, he was taken prisoner; in April 1942, he escaped from captivity, joined a detachment of Polish partisans, and was killed on October 28, 1942, in battle near the town of Tomaszów, 100 km from that very Lublin, which his tank division never reached..

The 37th Tank Division, whose entire participation in the “counteroffensive of the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front” amounted to futile attempts to drive a German infantry battalion away from the crossing near the town of Stanislavchik, lost 75% of its personnel. A total of 467 senior officers, 423 junior officers, and 1,533 enlisted men reached the assembly area near Pyriaty. In short, during the retreat to the Dnieper, the division had almost completely “melted away.”

As for the 212th Motorized Division of the 15th Military Corps, it disappeared entirely. Almost without a trace. While all reports from the commanders of the 15th Mechanized Corps assert that the 212th Motorized Division “defended Brody,” Ryabyshev and Popel, in their memoirs, unanimously state that they did not detect any of our troops in Brody at all. As early as July 1, during the general retreat of the 15th Mechanized Corps’ units, Division Commander Major General Baranov and Chief of Staff Colonel Pershakov went missing. In fact, S.V. Baranov had been wounded, taken prisoner, and died of typhus in a prisoner-of-war camp near Zamość in February 1942. After losing its command, the 212th Mechanized Division quickly and completely fell apart—by July 12, only 745 men had reached Pyriatyn...

During those same days (June 27–29), the unceasing retreat of the units and formations of the 4th Mechanized Corps began; the corps had remained on the sidelines of the main events all that time. An operational report from the headquarters of the 6th Army dated June 27 reads verbatim: “...The 4th Mechanized Corps, having completed a night march from the Sudova Vyshnia area, began concentrating in the forest area north of Obroshin at 6:00 a.m. (a retreat of 40 km toward the suburbs of Lviv. — M.S.)... On June 26, 1941, enemy units numbering up to a battalion were operating in front of the corps (an infantry battalion against a mechanized corps. — M.S.). No enemy was detected in the Mostyska area. The corps did, however, engage in combat...” (29, p. 197).

With each passing day, the pace of the retreat steadily increased: on June 29, the 4th Mechanized Corps left Lviv; by July 3, the corps was already in Zbarazh (135 km east of Lviv); and by the morning of July 9, the 4th Mechanized Corps was in the area of the town of Ivano-Pol (180 km from Zbarazh). Finally, on July 12, the remnants of the 4th Mechanized Corps crossed the Dnieper via the bridges at Kyiv and concentrated in the area of Pryluky (120 km east of the Dnieper, 650 km from the border). In fact, there was no longer a unified and command-and-control-capable mechanized corps, since, even as the main forces withdrew across the Dnieper, individual units of the 4th Mechanized Corps continued to fight tenaciously in the area of Berdichev and Kazatin—well west of the Dnieper...

Incredibly, the commander of the 4th Mechanized Corps, Vlasov, faced no consequences for any of this. That is to say, he was, of course, later hanged—but for an entirely different reason. And in the summer of 1941, he was even promoted and became commander of the 37th Army. Comparing Vlasov’s career with the tragic fate of the Western Front command, which was executed to the last man (S.I. Oborin, commander of the 14th Mechanized Corps, who had been wounded in battle, was taken directly from the hospital to be executed), one has to admit that Comrade Stalin was truly a great man. Not everyone is capable of understanding the logic behind his executions and acts of mercy...

For fans of conspiracy theories, here is a “decoding” of a few more names and positions. Muzychenko, commander of the 6th Army, surrendered on August 6, 1941, in the “encirclement” near Uman, where

the remnants of the 6th Army were crushed. Meandrov, chief of the operations department of the 6th Army headquarters, surrendered, became one of the founders and leaders of Vlasov's "army," and was hanged in 1946. Major General Richter, Chief of Staff of the 6th Rifle Corps of the 6th Army, surrendered; he actively collaborated with the German intelligence services (according to some sources, he headed the Abwehr's Warsaw Reconnaissance and Sabotage School) and was executed by firing squad in August 1945. To the right of the 4th Mechanized Corps was the 27th Rifle Corps. The corps commander, Major General Artemenko, surrendered and was executed in June 1950; he was rehabilitated in June 1957. To the left was the 13th Rifle Corps. The corps commander, Major General Kirillov, surrendered, was executed in August 1950, and was rehabilitated in 1957.

Meanwhile, amid the general chaos and the onset of an uncontrolled retreat by the troops of the Southwestern Front, Major General M.I. Potapov, commander of the 5th Army, was preparing a new offensive. According to the commander's plan, Rokossovsky's 9th Mechanized Corps and Feklenko's 19th Mechanized Corps, together with units of the 15th Rifle Corps, were to launch an offensive from the Goryn River line toward Mlyniv (see Map No. 5). After heavy fighting, these mechanized corps—which had been the "weak link" in the Southwestern Front's armored forces from the outset—were now little more than the remnants of their former tank formations. For example, the 9th Mechanized Corps had only 32 tanks, while in Tsibina's 43rd Tank Division (19th Mechanized Corps), 60 T-26 tanks and one T-34 remained in service. The strength of the 135th Rifle Division, which had been attached to reinforce the mechanized corps, had dwindled to 1,511 men (92) after a week of fighting.

The 41st Tank Division of the 22nd Mechanized Corps was to serve as the main striking force of the new (and, as it turned out, final) counteroffensive by the troops of the Southwestern Front. Attentive readers will hopefully still recall how, in the early days of the war, this division was shuttled back and forth between Volodymyr-Volynskyi and Kovel, how it was "picked apart," and how, during its retreat through the dense forests of the Ukrainian Polissya, the division lost most of its tanks. But all things come to an end—and in late June, the remnants of the 41st Tank Division and the 215th Motorized Division joined up with the main forces of the 5th Army. According to Vladimirsky's monograph, by June 29, the 41st Tank Division had 106 T-26 tanks and 16 heavy K-YaV-2 tanks in its ranks; another 15 light T-26 tanks, gathered along the retreat routes, ended up in the 215th Motorized Division (its tank regiment had originally been armed exclusively with VT tanks). The artillery of the 15th Rifle Corps was also quite powerful; in addition to 150 divisional guns ranging in caliber from 45 to 107 mm, it included 60 122-mm howitzers and 67 152-mm howitzers (which, in terms of the total weight of a single salvo, was three times greater than the firepower of a fully equipped Wehrmacht infantry division).

The plan for the counterattack promised success. But that was not to be...

"When the troops on the left flank of the 5th Army were finishing their preparations to go on the offensive," writes Vladimirsky, "a new order was received from the commander of Army Group South-3, in which the 5th Army was tasked with beginning its withdrawal at nightfall on July 1 and retreating to the Sluch River line by the morning of July 5... Due to the tight timeline for the withdrawal, offensive operations were to be concluded no later than the evening of July 1" (92).

One cannot fail to note the consistency with which the command of the 3rd Southern Front thwarted any organized offensive operations by the troops under its command. Nevertheless, the offensive began at 3:00 p.m. on July 1. By 10:00 p.m. on July 1, the tankers of the 41st Tank Division, having routed up to three battalions of German motorized infantry, were already 15 km from Dubno. Had the 41st Tank Division's attack been coordinated in time and place with the actions of Popel's group, it is highly

likely that several thousand soldiers and several dozen tanks could have been extricated from the encirclement. Alas, once again, there was no coordination whatsoever between the Soviet force groupings, which were located half a hundred kilometers apart.

Meanwhile, the enemy, deeply concerned by the 5th Army's activity, committed the reserves of the commander of Army Group South to the battle. On the morning of July 2, the Wehrmacht's 99th Infantry Division and the SS "Adolf Hitler" Motorized Division, hastily transferred via Lutsk, launched an attack on the rear of the Soviet force. Our divisions, already depleted by previous battles, were unable to withstand the onslaught of two fresh German divisions; moreover, an order from the front headquarters demanded the immediate withdrawal of units from the battle. On the evening of July 2, all units of the 5th Army began retreating to the Sluch River line...

At noon on June 30, after units of the 4th, 15th, and 8th Mechanized Corps had withdrawn from Lviv and Brody toward Ternopil, German divisions surrounding the city of Dubno on all sides launched an offensive. Like a pack of dogs closing in on a cornered bear, three Wehrmacht infantry divisions (the 111th, 44th, and 75th), the 16th Panzer Division, and the 16th Motorized Division rushed at Popel's group. The Germans took full advantage of the two-day respite granted to them by the Soviet command's sluggishness—they brought in large artillery forces and stockpiled a large supply of shells.

The offensive began after a powerful two-hour artillery barrage. Popel recalls: "Our forward positions vanished in smoke and dust. Clouds blocked out the sun... The boundary between the field and the forest vanished, the road vanished, the horizon vanished..." (105). There was almost nothing with which to respond—the artillery regiment of the 34th Tank Division had only a handful of shells left.

But the "Bear" was still very strong. The KV heavy tanks, having fired their entire ammunition load, rammed the German tanks and trampled the enemy guns into the Ukrainian black soil. During the battle, they managed to capture several German howitzer batteries with large reserves of shells, which were immediately unleashed upon the enemy.

By the end of the day, the fighting had subsided. The Germans had not advanced a single kilometer and had suffered heavy losses. But Popel's group's situation had also become critical: fuel and ammunition were running out, all radio stations were destroyed, and the medical stations were overflowing with the wounded. Late in the evening of June 30, after much deliberation, the commanders made the following decision: the tank crews left without combat vehicles (and they didn't even have rifles), the medical battalion, and the rear services, under the cover of a single tank regiment, would break through the encirclement near the village of Verba that night and head south toward Ternopil. This group was led by Colonel Pleshakov, commander of the 27th Motorized Rifle Regiment. Each of the group's sixty tanks was loaded with only a few shells—their main hope lay in the element of surprise, a swift onslaught, and a tank ramming maneuver. This strategy proved successful. The Germans, overconfident to the point of recklessness, were asleep. Pleshakov's detachment advanced almost without a fight. About a week later, on the Ternopil–Proskuriv highway, the detachment caught up with units of the 8th Mechanized Corps retreating eastward.

The main forces of Popel's group (which by this point had been reduced to 80 tanks and several artillery batteries) launched a final attempt on the morning of July 1 to break through along the Dubno–Brody highway to the southwest, where, according to Popel's overly optimistic assumption, Ryabyshev was supposed to be stationed with two divisions of the 8th Mechanized Corps. Once again, the lack of communication and information played a fateful role in this decision. There were no longer any of our troops in the Brody area.

What can we say about this battle when its eyewitness, participant, and commander writes:

"...Amid the veil of bloody fog, individual episodes and scenes emerge. No matter how much I might want to, I cannot coherently describe this incomparable slaughter that lasted all day... The lush grass all around had turned yellow from the smoke... A ceaseless roar filled the air, rolling through the forest. It was impossible to tell where our tanks were and where the fascist ones were. All around were black steel boxes from which tongues of flame burst forth..." (105).

Colonel I. V. Vasilyev, commander of the 34th Tank Division, was killed; Division Commissar M. M. Nemtsev and Lieutenant Colonel P. I. Volkov, commander of the 24th Tank Regiment of the 12th Tank Division, were reported missing; thousands of soldiers and commanders were killed, went missing, or were taken prisoner by the Germans. At sunset on July 1, the survivors—about a thousand people—gathered in the forest near the village of Kozin.

"I ordered the troops to fall in," writes N.K. Popel in his memoirs. "The men had seen it all that day. They wouldn't have been surprised if a German regiment had emerged from the bushes to attack. But fall in? What's the point? Had the brigade commissar lost his mind?" No, Commissar Popel was right. Without a doubt, it was precisely this mindset—"we are part of the regular army, with its regulations, discipline, and banner"—that saved the men from disgrace and certain death in captivity. Joining forces with groups of surrounded soldiers from other units, the detachment fought its way 250 kilometers along a vast arc stretching from Dubno to Slavuta to Korosten and, by the end of July 1941, reached the positions of the 5th Army's units in the Belokorovichi area.

THE TANK DEFEAT

Thus, with complete defeat and rout, ended the "tank battle in Western Ukraine," the largest battle of the war's first weeks. Presumably, it was only after the Germans had gathered and counted all the tanks, armored vehicles, howitzers, and motorcycles abandoned on the roadsides that they realized WHAT had threatened them...

Modern historians find themselves in a more difficult position. Those tanks are no longer around—whatever wasn't melted down in Germany's open-hearth furnaces was melted down after the war at factories in the Urals and Zaporizhzhia. It is impossible to determine with absolute certainty the reason why each of the 5,000 tanks of the Southwestern Front was lost. Nevertheless, even the few available documents allow us to formulate a well-reasoned hypothesis about the causes of this unprecedented defeat.

Since the history of the rout of the 15th Mechanized Corps is the best documented, we will begin our examination of the phenomenal "casualty rate" of tanks that engulfed the troops of the Southwestern Front in late June 1941 with this corps. The corps consisted of two tank divisions: the 10th and the 37th. The losses of the 10th Tank Division in the battle on June 23 and in subsequent skirmishes with the enemy are detailed, day by day and battle by battle, in the reports of the division commander and the corps commander (Vol. 28, pp. 193–213, and Vol. 29, pp. 253–275). As for the 37th Tank Division, it had no combat contact with the enemy—nor any losses from enemy air attacks—at all until June 28. Let us summarize all available information in two tables:

10th Tank Division T-34 T-28 BT-7 T-26 Total

Division strength as of June 22 63 38 51 181 30 363

Of these, operational and deployed: 63 37 44 147 27 318

Combat losses, June 22–26: 13 6 0 32 2 (?) 53

Actual strength at the end of the day on June 26: 10 5 4 20 0 39

??? 40 26 40 95 25 226

37th Tank Division: T-34, BT-7, T-26 Total

Division strength as of June 22 1 34 258 23 316

Left behind in Kremenets 1 0 15 10 26

Combat losses, June 22–26 • 0 0 0 0 0

“Actual strength at the end of the day on June 26” 0 29 185 7 221

??? 5 58 6 69 Thus, the 10th Tank Division—the most powerful in the 15th Mechanized Corps (and one of the best in terms of manpower and training in the entire Red Army)—was reduced to a thoroughly battered tank battalion in just five days!

Of the 318 serviceable tanks as of June 22, only 39 remained in service by the end of the day on June 26. Losses of “unknown origin” totaled 226 tanks. In five days. Even if we assume that the division commander’s report omitted some combat losses incurred during sporadic skirmishes with German infantry units, this inaccuracy in no way explains the discrepancy between the number of combat losses (53 tanks) and total losses (279 tanks). Particularly striking is the pattern and structure of losses among the triple-turreted T-28s, which quietly disappeared, likely without ever firing a single shot at the enemy. If the report is to be believed, the 48-metric-ton KV tanks, with their 75-mm armor, are in no way superior in combat survivability to the light BT-7 and T-26 tanks with their bulletproof armor—which is strange, to say the least. What is most surprising is that neither the report from the acting division commander nor the report from the acting corps commander even comments on these glaring facts!

In the 37th Tank Division, the situation was significantly better as of June 28. 221 tanks (out of 316) are ready for combat.

Another 26 tanks were awaiting their moment at the division’s permanent base in Kremenets. Three-quarters of the total number of “hopelessly obsolete” BT-7s successfully withstood several days of senseless driving along forest roads and, according to the division commander’s report, are still in working order. It is unknown where “only” 69 tanks disappeared to.

The combat losses of the 10th Tank Division on June 28 are specified as follows: 1 KV, 1 T-34, and 7 BT-7s. Starting on the morning of June 29, the 15th Mechanized Corps was withdrawn to the “front reserve,” which meant a continuous retreat toward the Dnieper. The status of the 15th Mechanized Corps’ tank fleet as of July 6–8 was as follows:

10th Tank Division KV T-34 T-28 BT-7 T-26 Total

Actual strength at the end of the day on June 26 10 5 4 20 0 39

Combat losses on June 28 1 1 0 7 0 9

Actual strength as of July 6 2 3 1 12 2(?) 20

At the time the report was signed by the acting commander of the 10th Tank Division, there were no tanks left in the division. Not a single one. This is explicitly stated in the text of the report (28, p. 211). The report also includes a table “breaking down” the causes of tank losses. The first thing that catches the eye is the vast “range” of causes. Instead of a clear and precise classification:

— lost due to enemy action (destroyed),

— lost without enemy action due to technical reasons (broke down),

— abandoned,

the report’s authors came up with 10 convoluted categories of causes:

1) destroyed and burned on the battlefield;

2) became inoperable while performing a combat mission and remained in enemy-occupied territory;

3) did not return from the battlefield with its crew after an attack;

4) burned as a result of bombing (let’s note right away that there is exactly ONE BT-7 tank in this category);

5) remained with its crew surrounded by the enemy due to technical malfunctions or a lack of fuel;

6) were left behind due to a lack of fuel and the inability to resupply them, since the area had been captured by the enemy;

7) went missing with their crews;

8) destroyed at assembly points for disabled vehicles due to the inability to evacuate them during the retreat;

9) Abandoned during the withdrawal due to technical malfunctions and the inability to repair and evacuate them;

10) became stuck on obstacles and could not be extricated or evacuated.

Only items 1 and 4 clearly refer to losses due to enemy action. The specific meaning of items 2 and 3 is unclear. If a tank “did not burn as a result of bombing” (item 4) and was not “destroyed and burned on the battlefield” (item 1), then for what other reason did it “fail to return from the battlefield with its crew after the attack”? After all, a tank is not a long-range bomber that flew deep into enemy territory

and was never seen again... And how should item 2 be interpreted? Strictly speaking, starting on the morning of June 22, ANY tank losses could be classified as “put out of action while performing a combat mission,” and after the rapid retreat eastward (on some days in July—150–200 km per day), all tanks without exception remained “in territory occupied by the enemy.” We must also not forget that this report was written in late July 1941, hundreds of kilometers from the scene of the events, under conditions that completely ruled out the possibility of inspecting the lost vehicles and verifying the accuracy of the stated reasons for the disappearance of three hundred tanks...

In order for the casualty statistics to make any meaningful sense, it is probably necessary to combine items 1 and 4 (“combat casualties”), items 2 and 3 (“presumed combat casualties”), and items 4–10 (“not due to enemy action”). In that case, the following picture emerges:

10th Tank Division T-34 T-28 BT-7 T-26 Total

Serviceable and deployed on June 22 63 37 44 147 27 318 ■

Combat losses 11 20 4 54 7 96 1

Presumed combat losses: 4 4 5 5 29

Not due to enemy action 34 8 36 41 12 131

??? 7 — 5 0 47 62 Thus, two-thirds of the tanks that were fully operational on the evening of June 22 were lost without enemy action.

Specifically, 41 of the 63 impenetrable KV tanks that were available. And finally, none of the 10 evasive explanations sufficed to account for the loss of 62 tanks (which constituted a tank brigade according to the fall 1941 organizational chart).

The report’s authors simply and succinctly omitted any mention of them.

The tanks of the 37th Tank Division were almost entirely lost during the retreat. There are no precise figures on tank losses in the single battle at Stanislavchik, but judging by the description of the battle given above, the division lost no more than 10–20 tanks. After that, the number of tanks dropped from two hundred to 14 for “unknown reasons.” Overall, 80% of the 37th Tank Division’s tanks were lost—it is unknown where or how.

37th Tank Division T-34, BT-7, T-26 Total:

Actual strength at the end of the day on June 26: 29, 185, 7,221

Combat losses on June 28: 20 (?)

Actual strength as of July 6–8: 2 12 0 14

999 27 173 7 187

The 4th Mechanized Corps was the most powerful in terms of the number of tanks (including the latest KV and T-34 models) on the Southwestern Front. The corps consisted of two tank divisions: the 8th

and the 32nd.

During the first two days of the war, the 8th Tank Division, along with the entire 4th Mechanized Corps, was engaged in the Yavoriv–Nemirov area, where 19 T-34 tanks were lost during skirmishes with German infantry. The division commander's report made no mention of the loss of other types of tanks, but when the division came under the operational command of the commander of the 15th Mechanized Corps, it was armed with 65 tanks. Where, then, were the remaining 240 tanks of one of the Red Army's most powerful tank divisions at that moment? During the battle on June 28 in the Toporuv–Lopatin area, the 8th Tank Division lost 12 tanks. This was followed by a retreat and the participation of a group of tanks from the 8th Tank Division in the multi-day battle near Berdichev. The commander of the 8th Tank Division, Colonel Pyotr Semenovich Fotchenkov, was killed in August 1941 in the Uman "cauldron." By that time, the division had long since ceased to exist as a tank formation. However, a report compiled by the commander of the 8th Tank Division remains, which contains a comprehensive and detailed answer to the questions posed above. A notable feature of this report is the direct and explicit use of the term "abandoned" (which accounts for the loss of 107 tanks). For ease of understanding, let us compile all the data into a single table (152, p. 246):

No. T-34 T-28 BT-7 and T-26 Total

Initial quantity as of June 22, 1941 50 140 68 67 325

Destroyed 13 54 10 8 85

Abandoned, missing in action, other 25 49 27 28 129

Sent to the factory, hours of operation 8 32 8 48

Stuck in swamps 2 2 2 6

Arithmetic remainder 2 3 31 21 57

Thus, the main components of tank losses in one of the Red Army's best divisions were: "abandoned," "missing in action," "stuck in swamps," and the mysterious "other." The remaining 57 tanks exist, alas, only arithmetically, not in reality. Thus, according to reports from the Southwestern Front's Motorized and Armored Directorate dated July 15–17, the 8th Tank Division is listed as having only 32 tanks, and among them there are neither 31 nor even a single T-28. Against the backdrop of such "order in the tank units," the reliability of the information on combat losses is highly questionable: 13 KV and 54 T-34 tanks—which were practically invulnerable to German 37-mm anti-tank guns—were allegedly destroyed, yet the number of tanks with anti-bullet armor and gasoline engines (T-28, BT, and T-26) destroyed was nearly four times smaller!

The situation was similar with tank losses in the 32nd Tank Division of the 4th Mechanized Corps. There is a detailed report by the commander of the 32nd Tank Division, Colonel E.G. Pushkin, on the division's combat operations (28, pp. 181–192). The total losses sustained by the division during battles with German infantry between June 23 and 29 amount to 23 tanks. Another 11 tanks were lost by two tank battalions, which had been deployed to the Radehiv area on the evening of June 22, where a battle with units of the German 11th Panzer Division took place on the afternoon of June 23. Total combat losses amounted to 34 tanks. Following these battles, a retreat across the Dnieper began, during which the 32nd Tank Division engaged in isolated skirmishes with the advancing German motorized units

pursuing it. The specific number of losses in these skirmishes is mentioned only once in Colonel Pushkin's report:

"...July 10, 1941. Captain Karpov's tank group (10 tanks and 2 armored vehicles) concentrated in the Beizymovka area and at 20:00 attacked the enemy in the direction of Olshanka, but, lacking infantry support, withdrew at 23:00 and took up defensive positions 300–400 m south of Olshanka. Over the course of the following day, the group fought a desperate battle in the same area, and as a result of the 32nd Motorized Rifle Regiment's retreat from the front, it was destroyed and left on the battlefield, with the exception of a single tank..." (28, p. 185).

Thus, 43 tanks were "specifically identified" as lost in battle. It can be assumed that a figure for losses comparable to the one cited was not reflected in the division's account of combat operations. However, the "Summary Report on Material Assets" attached to the report lists entirely different loss figures. A total of 269 tanks were lost (37 KV, 146 T-34, 28 BT-7, 58 T-26).

However, even these phenomenal figures for the losses of armored tanks do not match the actual remaining stock. Simple arithmetic shows that even after losing 37 KV tanks, the 32nd Tank Division should have still had 12 such tanks remaining. But a report titled "On the Status and Availability of the Front's Mechanized Corps' Equipment," signed on July 15, 1941, by the Chief of the Armored Troops Directorate of the Southwestern Front, states that in the entire 4th Mechanized Corps (and not just the 32nd Tank Division alone!) there were only 6 KV tanks remaining (29, p. 89).

The fact that most of the tank losses were not due to enemy action is also evidenced by the ratio of personnel losses to losses of military equipment. Thus, according to a report by the commander of the 32nd Tank Division, the division's 63rd Tank Regiment lost 17 men killed and 63 wounded between June 22 and July 30, 1941. At the same time, 145 armored vehicles were lost (14 KV tanks, 61 T-34s, 42 T-26s, 19 T-37s, and 9 BA-10s) (28, p. 190), To understand these figures, one must remember that the personnel of a tank regiment do not consist solely of tank crews; accordingly, tank crew members account for only a portion of the aforementioned number of human casualties...

Documents that shed light on and provide details about the phenomenal "tank losses" that swept through the Red Army in the first weeks of the war were declassified more than forty years ago. The copy of "Collection of Combat Documents of the Great Patriotic War No. 35" that I worked with (and from which most of the information cited in the previous chapters was taken) bears a blue stamp: "Declassified. General Staff Directive No. 203995 dated November 30, 1965."

However, in our country, declassifying something and making it accessible are not at all the same thing. These documents remain unknown (and, to be honest, inaccessible) to the so-called "general public" to this very day. But what's interesting is that so-called Soviet "historians" began preparing well in advance for the moment when the cat would finally be let out of the bag. In hundreds of books and articles, they had already managed to proclaim to "the whole world" that Soviet tanks were extremely unreliable, primitive, worn out, and past their service life… That is precisely why they fell apart on the move in the very first days of the war…

Unfortunately, I'm not joking. For four decades, publications claiming to be scientifically rigorous have perpetuated the myth that "by the start of the war, three-quarters of the tanks were in need of repair," with anywhere from 29% to 44% requiring "overhaul." Sadly, even the authors of such an authoritative statistical study as *The Seal of Secrecy Lifted* did not hesitate to inform readers that of the 14,200 Soviet tanks in the active army on June 22, 1941, "3,800 were fully combat-ready" (35, p. 345).

This nonsense was copied from the writings of Soviet “historians” into the monographs of other Western “researchers” (such as the infamous American Colonel David Glantz) and, as a “first-rate imported product,” found its way back onto the shelves of Russian bookstores...

At the same time, actual data on the technical condition of the Red Army’s tank fleet has been known since at least November 1993 (the date of the well-known publication by N. Zolotov and S. Isaev, “They Were Combat-Ready,” in Issue No. 11 of the *Military History Journal*), N. Zolotov and I. Isaev also revealed the truly ingenious method by which this long-standing falsification was constructed. The fact is that, pursuant to Order No. 15 of the People’s Commissar of Defense of the USSR dated January 10, 1940, armored vehicles were classified into the following five categories:

1. New, never previously in service, and fully fit for its intended purpose.

2. In service, fully operational, and fit for its intended purpose.

3. Requiring repairs at district workshops (medium repairs).

4. Requiring repair at central repair shops and factories (overhaul).

5. Unserviceable (tanks in this category were decommissioned and not included in the summary reports).

I hope the reader has already figured out exactly how they were being misled: only Category 1—that is, brand-new tanks—was classified as “combat-ready,” while the entire Category 2 was classified as “in need of repair”! This is roughly the same as declaring only the cars on display in a showroom to be technically sound, while labeling all those driving on the streets as “in need of repair”...

The last prewar “Report on the Inventory and Technical Condition of Combat Vehicles as of June 1, 1941” (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense, f. 38, op. 1 1353, d. 924, pp. 135–138, d. 909, pp. 2–18) shows that the troops of the five western border districts had in service (excluding obsolete T-27 light tanks and those withdrawn from combat units) 12,782 tanks, of which 10,540 (82.5% of the total fleet) were “fit for use for their intended purpose” (Categories 1 and 2). Specifically, the Kiev Military District (the future Southwestern Front) had 5,465 tanks, of which 4,788 (87.6%) were classified as Categories 1 and 2.

These figures, however, do not reflect the technical condition of the tanks directly assigned to the mechanized corps of the Kyiv Military District. The fact is that there were slightly more tanks in the district than there were in the mechanized corps.

The eight mechanized corps (the 22nd, 15th, 4th, 8th, 16th, 9th, 19th, and 24th) of the Kiev Military District had “only” 4,808 tanks out of the total of 5,465. More than six hundred tanks were assigned to the reconnaissance battalions of infantry divisions, the tank regiments of cavalry divisions, training centers, repair bases, and depots. There is every reason to believe that it was precisely the mechanized corps—and by no means the infantry divisions—that received new (or nearly new) tanks; accordingly, the percentage of tanks “fit for their intended use” in the mechanized corps was even higher than the district average.

Now, let’s move from the general figures to an analysis of the technical condition of the tanks in the

10th Tank Division of the 15th Mechanized Corps—the very division whose phenomenal losses we began this chapter by discussing. Let's open once again the "Report on the Combat Operations of the 10th Tank Division on the Front Against German Fascism" and read there: "...the KV and T-34 tanks were, without exception, new vehicles and, by the time combat operations began, had been in service for up to 10 hours (having undergone mainly break-in runs)...

The T-28 tanks had an average service life of up to 75 engine-hours...

The BT-7 tanks had a service life ranging from 40 to 100 operating hours...

The T-26 tanks were generally in good technical condition and had operated for only about 75 hours..." (28, p. 207).

Now let's move from "engine hours" to kilometers traveled, a unit everyone understands. At a very modest (and, for a high-speed BT tank, absurdly low) cruising speed of 10 km/h, that "meager" remaining 75–100 engine hours translates to 750–1,000 kilometers traveled. For a scheduled bus that must carry passengers from morning to night, this is a negligible amount. For a tank, it is more than enough. In war, tanks don't last that long anyway. A major offensive operation on a front-line scale involves an advance of 200–250–300 kilometers. Taking into account the maneuvering that is inevitable during battles lasting several days, these figures should be increased by a factor of 1.5–2, up to 500–600 km. The tanks of the 10th Tank Division had more than enough engine life to reach Lublin and Kraków. And nothing more was required of them. A tank that "survived" until the end of a major frontline operation fully justified all the costs of its production and operation. After that, it could be decommissioned or sent for major repairs with a clear conscience.

And this is by no means abstract theorizing. In reality, between 1943 and 1945, this is exactly how things unfolded:

"...In the 3rd Guards Tank Army during the Lviv-Sandomierz Offensive (summer of 1944), the number of repaired tanks and self-propelled guns significantly exceeded the number of combat vehicles available to the tank army at the start of the operation. In other words, during a single operation, each tank (self-propelled gun) was taken out of action two or three times (emphasis added here and below—M.S.) and returned to the combat formations of units and formations just as many times...

...An analysis of data on the losses of tank armies in 11 offensive operations allows us to highlight a number of important points regarding the issue at hand.

First, the irrecoverable losses of tank armies during an offensive operation lasting an average of 15–20 days amounted to about 25% of the initial number of tanks and self-propelled guns, while total losses amounted to about 82%.

Second, combat vehicles eligible for repair accounted for up to 70% of total losses (i.e., 57% of the initial number of tanks. — M.S.). Among the vehicles requiring repair were approximately 70% of tanks and self-propelled guns that had been put out of action by combat damage, and 30% (i.e., only 17% of the initial number. — M.S.) due to getting stuck and technical malfunctions...

The percentage of tanks repaired relative to the number of tanks and self-propelled guns available at the start of the operation ranged from 115% (Belgorod-Kharkiv Operation, 1st Guards Tank Army) to 221% (Vistula-Oder Operation, 2nd Guards Tank Army) (167, pp. 218–219).

These are excerpts from the monograph *Tank Strike*. The author is Army General A. I. Radzievsky, head of the Frunze Military Academy and, during the war, chief of staff of the 2nd Guards Tank Army.

And the tank losses alone during the so-called “counterattack by the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front” in June 1941 fall completely outside the “normal” parameters confirmed by many years of wartime experience. A “normal” situation (to the extent that this word is even applicable to war) is one in which the main cause of tanks being taken out of action is, of course, enemy action. Technical malfunctions and getting stuck in the terrain account for about 17% (i.e., less than one-fifth) of the initial number of tanks.

Finally, it can be firmly stated that neither before the summer of 1941 nor after it was such a massive “casualty rate” of Soviet tanks ever recorded. They proved to be “unreliable,” “malfunctioning,” or “beyond repair” only during the first weeks of the Soviet-German war. Prior to that, Soviet tanks had demonstrated remarkable endurance.

The first instance of combat use of BT tanks was the Spanish Civil War. A tank regiment of the Republican Army was formed from 50 BT-5 tanks, which in October 1937 moved into the combat zone on the Ebro River, having marched 630 (six hundred thirty) km in two and a half days (97). Perhaps the most severe test of the BT tanks’ mobility came at Khalkhin Gol. In late May 1939, two tank brigades (the 6th and 11th) undertook an unprecedented 800-km march across the scorching Mongolian steppe (air temperatures in those days reached 40 degrees; one can only imagine what it was like inside those steel boxes baked by the sun) to the area of future combat operations. Here is how Hero of the Soviet Union K.N. Abramov—commander of a tank battalion in the 11th Brigade—describes these events:

“...For our brigade, the combat alert sounded on May 28. We were given an hour and a half to assemble on alert; the battalion was ready to move in 55 minutes. Ahead of us lay an 800-kilometer march across the arid Mongolian steppe, unprecedented in its intensity and length... The column moved along a barely visible steppe road, worn down by camel caravans. In some places, the road disappeared—it had been buried by sand. To navigate sandy and marshy sections, the tanks had to be switched from wheeled to tracked drive. The well-trained crews completed this task in 30 minutes...”

By the end of the day on May 31, the entire battalion had reached the designated area. The 6th Tank Brigade took slightly longer (6 days) to complete the 800-km march. Six years after the battles at Khalkhin Gol, in August 1945, BT-7 tanks as part of the 6th Guards Tank Army took part in the so-called “Manchurian Strategic Operation.” The tank brigades then covered 820 (eight hundred twenty) km across the Greater Khingan Range at an average pace of 180 km per day (167). Of the total of 1,019 tanks of all types, only 78 (seventy-eight) were lost during the operation! (35, p. 373). The old “BT-7s” (the newest of which had been produced five years earlier) withstood even this ordeal. Even if we assume that the tanks had simply been in storage for all six years, their technical condition could only have deteriorated: the rubber hoses had become brittle, the gaskets had compressed, and corrosion had eaten away at the contacts...

The history of the T-34 tank, as described in all the books, began in March 1940, when the first two prototype tanks traveled 3,000 km under their own power along the route Kharkiv—Moscow—Minsk—Kyiv—Kharkiv. They made the journey during the spring mud season, on country roads (traveling on major highways and even using bridges during daylight hours was prohibited for reasons of secrecy). Yes, such a march was no easy feat for the vehicles—the main friction discs burned out, chips were found on the gear teeth of the transmissions, and the brakes overheated.

In the end, the service interval for production T-34 tanks was set not at 3,000 km (which was the fantastic figure specified in the technical specifications), but at “only” 1,000 km.

In the freezing cold of January 1943, during Operation “Don,” Soviet tank brigades advanced more than ^00 km across the snow-covered steppes of the Don region and routed large forces of the German Army Group “A,” which had broken through in the summer of 1942 into the oil-rich regions of Mozdok and Grozny. In the summer of 1944, during Operation “Bagration” (the defeat of the German Army Group “Center” in Belarus) the 5th Guards Tank Army, advancing across rough terrain through forests and swamps, covered 900–1,300 km at a pace of up to 60 km per day, with a total engine operating time of 160–170 hours (167, p. 227). In May 1945, tanks of the 3rd and 4th Guards Tank Armies covered 400 km from Berlin to Prague. They traversed mountainous and forested terrain in five days, and did so without significant technical losses. The legendary “T-34” saw action throughout the entire war and remained in service with many armies around the world until the mid-1950s. In the Finnish Army, captured Soviet tanks and “Komsomolets” light artillery tractors remained in service as late as 1961! Without spare parts, without operating manuals, amid the Finnish snows and swamps...

However, the most striking confirmation of the reliability and survivability of Soviet equipment can be found by analyzing the losses of the Red Army’s mechanized corps in the summer of 1941—not tank losses, but vehicle losses.

Let’s take another look at the report from the commander of the 10th Tank Division. Before hostilities began, the division had 864 serviceable trucks and tanker trucks on its roster. Of these, 613 vehicles made it across the Dnieper to Pyriatyn. An excellent result! Nearly three-quarters of the original number of vehicles traveled at least 500 km (the report even cites a figure as high as 3,000 km) from the border to the Dnieper—and this was on broken dirt roads, under enemy air attacks, without repair services or spare parts. Continuing with the “standard Soviet list” of reasons for the defeat, one would have to add a phrase about a “lack of fuel,” but that simply doesn’t happen in reality, so we have to admit that gasoline was found for the trucks.

If 613 out of 864 vehicles arrived in Pyriatyn, that means there were losses. The math gives us a figure of 251, while the report lists the causes of loss for 293 vehicles. This discrepancy may be due, in part, to the fact that in addition to trucks, the division also had dozens of passenger cars. But let’s not quibble over these minor details; what’s more important is this: what were the causes of the vehicle losses?

“210 vehicles were lost in combat; 34 vehicles, along with their drivers, were left surrounded by the enemy due to technical malfunctions and a lack of fuel and lubricants; 2 vehicles were destroyed at the assembly point for disabled vehicles because they could not be evacuated during the unit’s general withdrawal; 6 vehicles became stuck on obstacles because they could not be evacuated; and 41 vehicles were abandoned during the unit’s withdrawal due to technical malfunctions and the inability to repair them.” Thus, no more than 77 vehicles were lost due to technical malfunctions—less than 9% of the total initial number. This is simply an outstanding indicator of technical reliability. What kind of ultra-reliable and highly off-road-capable vehicles are these? The report provides a precise answer to this question as well: 503 GAZ-AA and 297 ZIS-5.

The GAZ-AA “Gazik” is a former American “Ford Model A.” A simple, cheap, “budget” truck. Simple and cheap for the early 1920s, when it was designed and put into production. By the early 1940s, it was already ready for a spot in a technical museum. The front axle was supported by a single leaf spring—

and even that was mounted across the frame—while the rear axle hung on two stubs—half-leaf springs. The carburetor had no air filter (just a hole for air intake, and that's it). At the "breakneck speed" of 40 km/h, only a deep rut could keep this vehicle moving in a straight line. After two or three trips from the collective farm field to the city grain elevator, the "Gazik" driver, with a sense of duty fulfilled, would take it in for repairs: to retighten the crankshaft's Babbitt bearings, flush the "vacuum-style" carburetor, and so on. And this rickety vehicle possessed greater reliability, off-road capability, and protection against air attacks than armored tracked vehicles—some of which (the BT-7 and T-34), by all measures of mobility, could be considered the best tanks in the world?

Is it possible to draw far-reaching conclusions based on casualty data from a single division? Of course not, so let's move on. The 37th Tank Division of the same 15th Mechanized Corps. The exact number of vehicles available at the start of hostilities is not specified in either the division commander's report or the acting corps commander's report. There are only complaints that "the motorized rifle regiment was completely understaffed in terms of vehicles"; on July 15, 1941, the division, concentrated in Pyriatyn, was reported to have: "T-34 tanks—1, BT-7 tanks—5, BA-10 armored cars—11, wheeled vehicles—173." One hundred seventy-three vehicles. And only 6 tanks out of 316.

Let's look at the report from the commander of the 32nd Tank Division of the 4th Mechanized Corps. Of 420 vehicles of all types (passenger cars, trucks, special-purpose vehicles, tanker trucks), 133 were lost (28, pp. 189–192), representing 32% of the original strength. As a reminder, 269 out of 323 tanks were lost.

The 18th Mechanized Corps of the Southern Front. Like other units of the Southern Front, it entered combat and was routed several weeks later than the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front. By the end of July, the 18th Mechanized Corps still existed. It had only 43 BT tanks and 19 T-26 tanks remaining in service, as well as 100 passenger cars and 1,771 cargo and special-purpose vehicles, including 1,230 "ultra-reliable" GAZ-AA trucks.

The 2nd Mechanized Corps of the Southern Front lasted the longest. As of August 1, the corps had 13,006 tanks (26% of its original strength) and 3,294 vehicles (87% of its original strength) (152, pp. 412, 415).

Now let's move on to the most generalized data. To do so, we will once again turn to the most official source—the statistical compendium "Classified No Longer," mentioned repeatedly above. The compilers of this work did a thorough job. Fourteen pages list the losses of weapons and military equipment by year of the war. Tanks are listed separately, guns separately, 122-mm howitzers separately from 152-mm howitzers, and so on. In the second half of 1941, the loss rates were monstrously high: 73% of tanks, 70% of anti-tank guns, 65% of mounted machine guns, 61% of mortars... Yet only 33% of the total number of vehicles were lost (35, pp. 352–363).

How is this possible? Were the primitive "Gaziks" and the ZIS trucks, which were only slightly superior to them, many times more reliable than tanks? More reliable than armored cars based on those very same ZIS trucks? Were plywood cabins stronger than steel armored hulls? And was there even enough gasoline to make a timely retreat from enemy-occupied territory? After all, a car is not a horse—and certainly not a Red Army soldier—no matter how much you "appeal to their sense of duty"; without fuel, it won't even move an inch...

But perhaps we're simply missing something important? Perhaps there's some law of war unknown to amateurs, according to which the survivability of plywood vehicles is higher than that of armored

tanks?

These doubts plagued me until I opened Reinhardt's monograph *The Turn at Moscow* (171, p. 381), well known to specialists. At the end of the book by the "defeated Hitlerite general," there is a table listing the Wehrmacht's losses of weapons and military equipment (including vehicles) on the Eastern Front in 1941. And my last doubts vanished. There are no miracles—vehicle losses in a fighting army are dozens of times greater than tank losses:

tanks vehicles ratio=

Red Army 20,500 159 thousand 8

Wehrmacht 2,831 116 thousand 41

The difference in the figures is striking. We will not yet discuss why the losses of the retreating Red Army were greater than those of the advancing Wehrmacht. One can find or invent many "objective" reasons for this. But in the Wehrmacht, for every tank lost, 41 vehicles were lost, while in the Red Army, the figure was only 8. And these are all averages for the second half of 1944. If we examine the breakdown of losses among the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front during the first three weeks of the war (while tanks were still available), the number of lost vehicles and tanks is practically equal—or, in absolute terms, more tanks were lost than vehicles!

And it's all very simple. The Wehrmacht was fighting. Yes, it was fighting to plunder foreign lands, carrying out the criminal will of an inhuman regime. But the German army was fighting, and that is why it prioritized preserving its tanks above all else. From the very first hours of the war, the Red Army turned into a mob of armed refugees for whom antiquated "GAZ-43s" were far more valuable than the newest, best tanks in the world...

Part 3

THE BARREL AND THE HOOP

THE ARITHMETIC OF HISTORY

On September 17, 1939, troops of the Red Army's Belarusian and Ukrainian Fronts invaded Poland. Thus, with this treacherous attack on a country with which it had signed a Non-Aggression Pact (concluded in 1932 and extended in 1937 until 1945), the Soviet Union began its direct participation in World War II. Two years later, in late summer 1941, it seemed to many—both friends and enemies of the Soviet Union—that the war was drawing to a close for the Soviet Union.

The objective set for the Wehrmacht under Operation Barbarossa ("the main forces of the Russian ground forces in Western Russia are to be destroyed in bold operations through the deep, rapid advance of tank wedges...") had already been accomplished by mid-July 1941. The troops of the Baltic and Western Military Districts (more than 70 divisions) were routed, pushed back 350–450 km east of the border, scattered throughout the forests, or taken prisoner.

Shortly thereafter, the same fate befell the 60 new divisions that had been incorporated into the Northwestern and Western Fronts between June 22 and July 9. The enemy occupied Lithuania, Latvia, and almost all of Belarus, and crossed the Bug, Neman, Western Dvina, Berezina, and Dnieper rivers.

On July 9, the Germans occupied Pskov, and on July 16, Smolensk. They covered two-thirds of the distance from the western border to Leningrad and Moscow in less than a month. The troops of the Southwestern Front retreated in disarray behind the old Soviet-Polish border; in mid-July 1941, Wehrmacht tank units occupied Zhytomyr and Berdychiv and reached the outskirts of Kyiv.

What Soviet historians modestly referred to as “a setback in the border battle” actually meant the complete rout of the Red Army’s First Strategic Echelon (which, in terms of the number of divisions, surpassed any army in Europe, and in terms of the number of tanks, surpassed all of them combined). Virtually all the equipment and heavy weaponry of the troops in the western military districts were lost. By July 6–9, the troops of the Northwestern, Western, and Southwestern Fronts had lost 11,700 tanks, 19,000 artillery pieces and mortars, and more than 1 million small arms (35, p. 368). The tank forces suffered particularly heavy, virtually irreplaceable losses. As early as July 15, 1941, the remnants of the mechanized corps were officially disbanded.

Between June 22 and July 6–9, the troops of the Northwestern, Western, and Southwestern Fronts lost 749,000 men killed, wounded, or missing in action (35, pp. 162–164). This figure does not include the losses of those units and formations of the Second Strategic Echelon that had already taken part in combat operations by early July; nor does it include the losses of the Northern Front (Leningrad Military District) and the Southern Front (Odessa Military District), which began active combat operations on June 29 and July 2, 1941, respectively.

The true significance of these horrific figures can only be understood by comparing them with the personnel losses of the Wehrmacht. In the famous “War Diary” of F. Halder, Chief of Staff of the German Army, the following figures are given for the Wehrmacht’s total losses (killed, wounded, missing) on the Eastern Front:

— 64,132 men as of July 6, 1941

— 92,120 men by July 13, 1941

Thus, the losses of the advancing Wehrmacht—which was advancing very successfully, at a rate of 20–30 km per day—and the defending Red Army were roughly in a ratio of 1 to 10. The figures characterizing the ratio of military equipment losses are no less telling. As noted above, by July 9 the Red Army had already lost 11,700 tanks, while the Wehrmacht’s tank divisions had suffered irreplaceable losses of only 503 tanks by the end of July 1941. To this figure should be added the loss of 21 “assault guns” $1118-111*. One could also add the loss of 92 Rg-1 light tanks. Even with this approach, the ratio of irretrievable tank losses between the sides stands at 1 to 19.

This is a “miracle” that defies all the canons of military science. According to sound logic—and the entire history of wars and armed conflicts—the attacking side’s losses should exceed those of the defending side. A casualty ratio of 1 to 10 is conceivable only in a scenario where white colonizers, having sailed to Africa with cannons and rifles, attack indigenous peoples defending themselves with spears and hoes. But in the summer of 1941, the situation on the western borders of the USSR was entirely different: the defending side was not inferior to the enemy in either numbers or armament; it significantly surpassed the enemy in the means of delivering a powerful counterstrike—tanks and aircraft—and, moreover, had the opportunity to build its defenses on a system of powerful natural barriers and long-term defensive fortifications.

By July 10–15, 1941, the Germans had occupied (or, more accurately, marched through) a territory of

700,000 square kilometers, which was approximately three times the size of the territory of Poland occupied by the Wehrmacht in September 1939, and six times the size of the territory of Belgium, the Netherlands, and a small portion of northern France, which the Wehrmacht had captured in May 1940.

It is probably worth dwelling a little longer on the comparison between the events of May 1940 and June 1941. For decades, Soviet historical propaganda spread rumors about a "triumphal march" that the Wehrmacht allegedly carried out through "defeated France." Recently, the sounds of this "march" have been growing louder and more frequent in the pages of the latest publications. This is understandable—once the scale of the Red Army's catastrophic defeat became known to the general public, authors of a certain political orientation were eager to portray the French army's defeat in the most vivid terms. We, however, will once again turn to simple and boring school subjects: arithmetic and geography.

The fighting in May 1940 took place in a "small patch" of Normandy and Flanders, with maximum distances of 300 km along the front and 350 km in depth. In terms of area, this territory roughly corresponds to the size of Lithuania, which one of the three—the smallest—Army Group North occupied in a single week in June 1941. The Wehrmacht's leading tank units reached the shores of the English Channel in the Boulogne-Calais area on May 23, 1940. This was, of course, a brilliant success—during the 14-day offensive, German tank divisions advanced 350 km.

Everything is relative. To determine where the German tank divisions were on the 14th day of the "march to the East," let us turn once again to F. Halder's diary. The "defeated Hitlerite general" was often and severely mistaken in his assessments and conclusions, but the Chief of the Wehrmacht General Staff did, after all, know the location of his troops:

"July 5, 1941, the 14th day of the war

Situation: Advances are being made across all sectors of the front in accordance with plans...

On the Army Group Center front, the right wing of Guderian's Panzer Group held a bridgehead on the Dnieper River in the Rogachev area (450 km from the nearest point on the border. — M.S.)... In addition to the Drissa, Gota's Tank Group also crossed the Western Dvina upstream from Polotsk in the Ulla area (425 km from the border. — M.S.) and secured a foothold on the river's northern bank... On the front of Army Group "North," Göppner's tank group is advancing successfully and is approaching Ostrov with its left flank (470 km from the border)...

July 7, the 16th day of the war

...On the Army Group South front, our troops have broken through the central section of the enemy's defensive line. The 11th Tank Division has broken through east of Polonne (260 km) and is now making its way toward Berdichev amid columns of retreating Russian troops. The 16th Panzer Division is in Starokostiantyniv (250 km). The 9th Panzer Division is currently engaged in a major tank battle in the Proskuriv area (280 km)..."

So, in terms of the pace of the "march," in the summer of 1941 the Wehrmacht advanced somewhat faster and along a much longer front than it had in May 1940. Now let's look at the situation during the first weeks of the war from another perspective. What losses did the Wehrmacht suffer during its so-called "triumphal march" in France and while overcoming the "fierce resistance" of the Red Army on the Eastern Front?

Tippelskirch's well-known monograph cites the following figures for Wehrmacht losses in the French Campaign: 27,000 killed, 18,400 missing in action, 111,000 wounded, for a total of 156,000 men (127). According to more precise data presented in the equally well-known work by Müller-Gillebrand, the number of fatalities amounted to 49,000 (11), which is even slightly higher than the total number of irreplaceable losses cited by Tippelskirch.

In F. Halder's diary, comparable figures for the Wehrmacht's total losses on the Eastern Front do not appear until the end of July 1941. If we convert Halder's data into a format more familiar to us (by combining the losses of enlisted men and officers), we get the following:

— 102,588 men (excluding the sick) as of July 16, 1941

— 179,500 men by the end of July (entry dated August 2).

— 213,301 men by July 31 (entry dated August 4).

By the end of July 1941, the Wehrmacht was advancing along a vast "front stretching from Narva to Chişinău" (1,450 km as the crow flies); behind the advancing forces lay territory ten times larger than the combat zone of the French Campaign. Given this, it would hardly be appropriate to compare German losses based on a simple "calendar principle": 35–40 days in the West versus 40 days in the East.

A comparison based on the "cost-benefit" principle would be far more accurate. According to the chronology generally accepted in Soviet historiography, the "border battle"—that is, the rout of the troops of the western border districts (the Baltic, Western, and Kyiv districts)—was confined to the period from June 22 to July 9. Already at this stage, the results achieved by German forces (the number of enemy troops routed, the depth of the advance, and the spoils captured) exceeded all the military (not to be confused with political) achievements of the French Campaign. The Wehrmacht's losses by this point, as noted above, stood at approximately 65,000–90,000 men—that is, 1.5 to 2 times fewer than the losses of the "triumphal march" on the Western Front!

Also noteworthy is the ratio of German tank losses (10:36).

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1 [Casualties in France (May–June 1940) 240 99 135 97 69 640

Eastern Front (as of late July 11, 1941) 97 140 153 96 17 503

Eastern Front (as of September 4–10, 1941) 152 231 252 125 38 798 Particularly striking are the nearly identical figures for losses of German medium tanks (Pz-Sch and Pz-1U) on the Western and Eastern Fronts—and this despite the fact that the main anti-tank weapon of the French Army was the 25-mm "Marianne" from Hotchkiss, while the Red Army's anti-tank armament ranged from 45-mm guns in infantry divisions to 76-mm and 85-mm guns in anti-tank battalions. We have not included the losses of the RKh-1 machine-gun tankettes here. First, because they are not tanks; second, because their enormous losses in France (182 units) would make the loss ratio even more surreal.

A comparison of the losses suffered by the German Air Force during the May 1940 battles in the skies over France and in the summer of 1941 on the Eastern Front leads to similar conclusions. During the

first three weeks of the war on the Western Front (May 10–31, 1940), the Luftwaffe's total losses (aircraft of all types) amounted to 978 aircraft. During the first three weeks of the war on the Eastern Front (June 22–July 12, 1941), the Luftwaffe's total losses (all aircraft types) ranged, according to various sources, from 473 to 550 aircraft—half as many as over France. Overall, during the entire campaign in the West (from May 10 to June 24), the Luftwaffe lost 1,401 aircraft irretrievably on the Western Front, and another 672 were damaged. During a comparable period (from June 22 to August 2, 1941), German air force losses on the Eastern Front totaled 968 aircraft shot down and 606 damaged (the highest known figures are given).

Thus, the Luftwaffe's losses on the Western Front were—in any of the time periods under consideration—higher than on the Eastern Front. It remains only to add that the maximum number of fighter pilots in the French Air Force and in the British Royal Air Force units based in France was approximately 700–750 as of May 10, 1940, while the fighter units of the Air Forces of the western military districts of the USSR, the Air Forces of the Black Sea and Baltic Fleets, there were about 3,500 fighter pilots by the start of the war (there were far more fighter aircraft, as the air force was being re-equipped with new types of aircraft, and in some fighter regiments, there were 1.5–2 times more aircraft than pilots).

Despite all this, the May battles in France are by no means an example of a successfully conducted defensive operation. Not a single French politician, historian, or writer has yet thought to call this disgrace "the great patriotic war of the French people." On the contrary, the phrase "May 1940" has become synonymous in France with catastrophe and the greatest national humiliation. "The shaken nation was in a state of shock, the army believed in nothing and hoped for nothing, and the state apparatus was spinning in a situation of utter chaos"—this is how Charles de Gaulle describes May 1940 in his memoirs. Churchill recalls how, on the morning of May 15, 1940, he was awakened by a phone call—the French Prime Minister, P. Reynaud, at the start of the sixth day of the war, was in a hurry to inform him that "all is lost…" And the losses that French, British, Belgian, and Dutch soldiers were able to inflict on the enemy at that time were only possible because of the confusion that prevailed amid the general chaos, panic, and paralysis of will among the country's top leadership...

In mid-July 1941, after the brilliant success of the initial operations, the German command had to realize that the encircled and routed armies of the USSR's western military districts represented only a fraction of the main forces of the Russian ground forces." And in place of the deployed divisions, more and more new formations kept arriving from the depths of the vast country. In concrete terms, this whirlwind of death looked like this. By the start of the war, the Western Front (the 3rd, 10th, 4th, and 13th Armies) comprised 44 divisions. After nearly all of them were destroyed in the massive "cauldron" between Białystok and Minsk, the High Command effectively created a new Western Front consisting of five armies: the 16th, 19th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd. Following this, on July 14, the Reserve Front was deployed behind the Western Front, consisting of six armies: the 24th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, and 32nd. By the end of July, three more armies were deployed on the western front: the 33rd, 43rd, and 49th.

The reason why the Red Army rapidly expanded its ranks to a scale completely beyond the enemy's reach is extremely simple. The number of divisions that the Wehrmacht was able to concentrate along the borders of the Soviet Union represented the maximum that a Germany of 80 million people could achieve in the second year after the start of general mobilization. On the other hand, the 150 divisions of the First Strategic Echelon that the Red Army had concentrated along its western borders by mid-June 1941 represented the minimum that the 200-million-strong Soviet Union was able to form as part of a covert, secret mobilization, even BEFORE the announcement of open general mobilization. On June 23, 1941, open mobilization began, and by July 1, 5.3 million people had been drafted into the

Armed Forces (which meant a twofold increase in the total number of military personnel compared to the situation as of June 22). But mobilization, of course, did not end on July 1. It was only just beginning...

In total, during the two-month Battle of Smolensk on the western front, 104 divisions and 33 brigades were committed to battle. To the two other strategic fronts (Leningrad and Kiev), the High Command dispatched another 140 divisions and 50 brigades (21). And this entire vast army was routed, surrounded, and taken prisoner in new “encirclements”—near Smolensk and Roslavl, Uman and Kyiv, Vyazma and Bryansk. The Germans captured Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odessa, blockaded Leningrad, and advanced to the outskirts of Moscow.

By the end of September 1941, the Red Army had lost 15,500 tanks, 66,900 artillery pieces and mortars, and 3.8 million small arms—all in the course of just seven major strategic operations (35, p. 368). By the end of July, air force losses had already reached 10,000 combat aircraft. These figures cannot even be compared to the enemy’s losses—the Wehrmacht simply did not possess such a large quantity of heavy weaponry.

On September 3, 1941, Stalin, attempting to both intimidate and appeal to Churchill’s compassion, wrote to him: “Without these two forms of assistance (he was referring to the British landing in France and the monthly supply of 400 aircraft and 500 tanks to the USSR. — M.S.) the Soviet Union will either suffer defeat or... lose for a long time its ability to take active measures on the front against Hitlerism...” (72, col. 233). Ten days later, Stalin did exactly what tens of thousands of victims of the Great Terror had been accused of and executed for: he called on the British imperialists to invade the country of the victorious proletariat. On September 13, he was already asking Churchill to “land 25–30 divisions in Arkhangelsk or transfer them via Iran to the southern regions of the USSR” (72, p. 239). Shocked by this turn of events, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt: “We could not shake the impression that they (the Soviet leaders—M.S.) might be considering a separate peace...”

Who knows—if Hitler had heeded the wise counsel of many of his accomplices and ended the war with the Soviet Union on terms roughly similar to those under which the armistice with France was signed in June 1940 (namely, reduction of the army to 10 infantry divisions, disarmament of the French air force and navy, |demilitarization of the economy), the history of the Old World * would have unfolded differently...

During the three months of the war, from June 22 to September 26, on the southern front alone, Soviet troops lost 1,934,700 small arms of all types—that is, rifles, machine guns, submachine guns, and revolvers. In total, in 1941, the Red Army lost 6,290,000 small arms (35, p. 367). Strictly speaking, this figure alone provides an exhaustive answer to the question of the notorious “mystery of 1941.” For those readers most outraged by the author’s vile insinuations, I would like to remind you that this figure is taken from the statistical compendium *Classified No Longer*, compiled by staff of the General Staff of the Russian Army under the overall direction of Colonel General G.F. Krivosheev.

On page 367 of that same compilation, anyone can read that across all fronts during the first six months of 1941, 40,600 artillery pieces of all types and 60,500 mortars were lost. Well, these losses are somewhat understandable. A gun is a heavy piece of equipment. Even the lightest one (the 76-mm regimental model of 1927) weighed just under a metric ton. The long-range 152-mm gun of the 1935 model weighed 17 metric tons. How could it be pulled out of an encirclement if the tractor broke down or was left stranded in the chaos of retreat without fuel? And how could this behemoth be moved across the very first little river? Wading through it—it would get stuck; crossing a bridge—but one would first

have to find a bridge, and not every bridge could support 17 metric tons.

Soviet historians explained the loss of tens of thousands of tanks and aircraft long ago and simply: they were old, unreliable “coffins” that burned “like candles”; there was no fuel, no spare parts... What else is there to argue about? But where did the millions of small arms go? The most widespread “small arm” in 1941 was the Mosin rifle. This rifle was and remains an unrivaled model of reliability and durability. You could submerge it in a swamp, bury it in sand, or drop it into salty seawater—and it would keep firing and firing. This true masterpiece of engineering weighs 3.5 kg without ammunition. This means that any young, healthy man (and it was precisely such men who made up the Red Army was made up of) could carry 3–4 rifles off the battlefield without much effort. And even the scrawniest collective farm mare, harnessed to a simple peasant cart, could haul a hundred rifles—left behind by killed and wounded soldiers—to the rear.

And another thing. Rifles aren’t handed out “just like that.” Each one has its own serial number; each is issued personally and against a signed receipt. Every soldier—even the “youngest” first-year recruit—was told that losing his personal weapon would result in a court-martial.

That said, let’s not oversimplify things. War is war. It’s not always possible to recover every single rifle on the battlefield. Not every truck or train car carrying weapons reaches its destination in a combat situation. Finally, a certain number of rifles and submachine guns may indeed have been damaged by fire, explosions, or subpolar cold... On page 367 of the collection *The Veil of Secrecy Lifted*, we read that 1.04 million small arms were lost in the four months of 1945, and 2.81 million in the 12 months of 1944.

Does this mean that during the six months of 1941, “normal” small arms losses for the Red Army (in the Wehrmacht, small arms losses were incomparably lower) would have amounted to approximately 1.5 million units? No, that is an incorrect, hasty conclusion. In 1944–1945, the size of the active army was twice as large as in 1941 (6.4 million versus 1.0 million; see p. 53 of the same collection). More people, more weapons—and consequently, more weapon losses. It would be more accurate to calculate it roughly as follows: in 1944, one million soldiers “lost” 36,000 small arms per month; consequently, for the six months of 1941, “normal” losses should not have exceeded 650,000–700,000 units. Yet 6.3 million were lost.

Thus, there was an “excessive” loss of 5.5 million small arms in 1941. Remember this number, dear reader. We will encounter it again shortly. For now, we will try to estimate the “excessive losses” in other types of weaponry.

Hitler’s “Blitzkrieg” was primarily a tank war. The main means of anti-tank defense at that time were anti-tank guns. As of June 22, 1941, the Red Army had 14,900 of them on its books (in reality, even more, since the compilers of the collection *The Seal of Secrecy Has Been Lifted* for some reason did not include the 76-mm and 88-mm guns in service with the PTABs). Over the first six months of 1941, the military-industrial complex delivered another 2,500 anti-tank guns to the troops. This brought the total inventory to 17,400 units, of which 70% (12,100 guns) were lost.

And for the entire year of 1943—all 12 months of it—5,500 anti-tank guns were lost, which amounted to only 14.6% of the total stock. The year 1943 was not chosen at random as a point of comparison. It was the year of the massive tank battles on the Kursk Salient, the year when the Germans began mass production of the “Tiger” and “Panther” heavy tanks, against which our “40-punders” (which still accounted for 95% of the total stock in 1943) were completely helpless. And yet, in 1943, the Red

Army lost an average of 460 anti-tank guns per month, whereas in 1941—at a time when two out of every three German tanks on the Eastern Front were light vehicles with bulletproof armor—it lost 2,000 per month. That is 4.5 times more.

The proportions of field artillery piece losses are equally “striking.” In 1943, 5,700 pieces were lost (9.7% of the total), while in the first six months of 1941, 24,400 were lost (56% of the total). The estimated “average monthly” losses in 1941 were 8.5 times higher than in 1943. Against this generally bleak backdrop, a single “bright spot” stands out sharply: losses of heavy, large-caliber guns (203 mm and larger) amounted to only 9.1% of the total in 1941. The explanation is extremely simple. This is a classic example of what is known as “the exception that proves the rule.”

Heavy artillery (and it was indeed heavy, ranging from 17 to 45 metric tons) was withdrawn from the territory of the Western Military Districts to the deep rear in the very first days of the war. Marshal of Artillery N.D. Yakovlev (head of the General Artillery Directorate during the war) recalls:

“...The most significant measure, of which I am still proud to this day, was the categorical order issued by the Supreme Command on my recommendation to withdraw all high-caliber and special-purpose artillery to the rear. Moreover, the withdrawal was to be immediate, without any reference to the extremely difficult situation of the first days of the war... All 203- and 230-mm guns, as well as the 152-mm long-range guns (only a few of which were lost), along with their crews, were moved to the deep rear in time...” (170, p. 92).

It is difficult to say whether such a decision is something to be proud of, but it was carried out, and the guns evacuated “deep into the rear” found themselves outside the zone of chaos and panicked flight that characterized the first months of the war. That is why they survived.

Theoretically, the most reliable type of firearm is the mortar. A tube is just a tube—there’s simply nothing there to break: no breech, not a single moving part, and the “tube” itself (unlike the barrel of an artillery piece) is subjected to almost no pressure from propellant gases. And yet, in the second half of 1941, losses of 50-mm mortars amounted to 64% of the total inventory, 82-mm mortars to 60%, and 120-mm mortars to 51%. In 1943, these exact same mortars almost stopped breaking down: over 12 months, 12.5%, 9.2%, and 8.6% of the total stock of 50-, 82-, and 120-mm mortars, respectively, were lost.

The main question is: in the summer of 1941, were all these weapons (mortars, machine guns, tanks, rifles, and aircraft) lost in battle, or were they abandoned by Red Army soldiers and commanders who had fled into the forests and across the fields?

THAT MUCH AND THEN SOME

On July 17, 1941, Mikhailov, head of the Political Propaganda Directorate of the Southwestern Front, reported:

“...In the units of the front, there were many instances of individual soldiers, groups, and subunits fleeing the battlefield in panic. This panic was often spread by self-serving individuals and cowards to other units, misleading higher-level headquarters about the actual situation at the front, about combat strength and troop numbers, and about their own losses.

The number of deserters is exceptionally high. In the 6th Rifle Corps alone, during the first 10 days of

the war, 5,000 deserters were apprehended and returned to the front...

According to incomplete data, during the war, blocking detachments apprehended approximately 54,000 men who had lost contact with their units or fallen behind them, including 1,300 officers..." (68).

This is based on "incomplete data," and these are only those who were apprehended within three weeks amid the general collapse of the Southwestern Front....

The number of deserters who escaped capture can be estimated by the fact that, according to the compilation *Classified No Longer*, the losses of the Southwestern Front from June 22 to July 6 amounted to:

— 65,755 wounded and sick,

— 165,452 killed and missing in action.

By using the conjunction "and," the compilers of the collection cleverly concealed the deserters within the total number of irreplaceable losses; however, given the ratio of wounded to killed—which was very consistent across all armed conflicts of the 20th century at 3 to 1—it can be assumed that approximately 140,000 people (ten divisions!) fled or surrendered. And this was on just one front and only during the first two weeks of the war—the very weeks during which the mechanized corps of the Southwestern Front were completely routed (as discussed in Part 2 of our book).

Those who were captured and, in one way or another, returned to active duty constituted only a fraction (as will be shown below—a small fraction) of the total number of "deserters." The quotation marks are not used by accident. The situation that had developed in the Red Army in the summer of 1941 was such that it becomes extremely difficult to describe it using conventional terms.

The "typical pattern" of the rout and disappearance of a Red Army unit (as evident from numerous memoirs, books, and documents) was as follows:

Point One. Loss of the commander. The reasons could vary widely: killed in action, wounded, sent to higher headquarters to assess the situation, committed suicide, or simply deserted. With regard to units formed in the western, "liberated" regions of the USSR, "killed by subordinates" can be added to this list. The loss of a commander was the most common, but not the only "trigger" leading to the rapid disintegration of a military unit. Such a trigger could be a real breakthrough by enemy tanks into the flank or rear, automatic gunfire from a small group of German motorcyclists, or even simply someone's bloodcurdling scream: "We're surrounded!"

Point Two. Junior commanders who have taken charge of the decapitated military unit decide to "break through to the east." The seemingly simple nature of this decision is deceptive. It is impossible to outrun a motorized enemy on foot, and a unit cut off from communications and supplies will quickly run out of vehicles and fuel. Having left their field fortifications and abandoned most of their heavy weapons, the troops become a defenseless target for enemy aircraft and artillery. Finally, the very situation of retreat—the sense of their own weakness in the face of the enemy—extremely demoralizes the troops.

Point Three. After several failed attempts to break through, the survivors decide to "retreat in small

groups.” That’s it. This is the end. In a few days (or hours), the former battalion (regiment, division) crumbles into dust and ashes.

Point Four. A huge number of lone “wanderers,” having roamed aimlessly, without purpose, and without food through the fields and forests, make their way to the villages, to the people. And in the village—the Germans. From there, there are very few options left: a compassionate widow, a prisoner-of-war camp, or service in the “police.” That’s all.

What term are we justified in using to describe these people? Deserters, traitors to the Motherland, those who fell behind their military unit, those missing in action, those who surrendered, or those taken prisoner? By what standards, by what measure can we determine which is more prevalent in this scenario: “didn’t know how to fight” or “didn’t want to fight”? And is it even possible to distinguish between these categories—ability and desire, skill and motivation—in an “activity” such as war, where a person is required to constantly overcome the instinct of self-preservation, which is fundamental to all living beings?

Without in any way claiming to replace the judicial authorities or offer personal judgments, we will attempt to at least roughly assess the scale of the phenomenon itself.

Chronologically, the first (and probably the most widespread) form of desertion was evading mobilization in the first days and weeks of the war. To a reader born in the postwar USSR and raised on endless stories about crowds of high school students besieging military registration offices, such a statement would sound like malicious slander. However, as early as 1992, fully official military historians—the authors of the monograph *1941: Lessons and Conclusions*—cited the following figures:

“A total of 5,631,600 people from the Soviet Union’s mobilization reserves were left behind in territory temporarily occupied by the enemy... in the Baltic Military District, these losses amounted to 810,844; in the Western Military District—889,112; in the Central Military District—1,625,174; and in the Odessa Military District—813,412 people...” (3, p. 114).

Of course, by no means should every one of these 5.6 million instances of conscripts failing to report to the draft office be regarded as deliberate evasion of conscription. Quite often, the military registration and enlistment office itself had disappeared before the conscripts had a chance to arrive. However, it is not worth exaggerating the significance of the Wehrmacht’s rapid advance, much less declaring it the main cause of the multimillion-strong losses among the conscript contingent.

The geography and arithmetic involved in this matter are extremely simple.

The Western Special Military District covered the entire territory of Belarus and the Smolensk Region of the RSFSR. The Germans occupied most of this territory only by the end of July 1941.

The Kiev Military District encompassed all of Right-Bank Ukraine and part of the Left Bank within the Kiev Oblast. The Germans did not cross the Dnieper until September.

The Odessa Military District encompassed not only the Odessa Oblast, but also the Mykolaiv, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts of Ukraine, as well as Moldova and Crimea. The occupation of these vast territories along the Black Sea and Azov Sea coasts was not completed until late fall 1941.

If a few months were not enough to round up conscripts—a task for which the mobilization plan had allotted only a matter of days—then the use of the term “draft evasion” becomes entirely appropriate and justified. Nor should we forget that by no means all those who reported to the military registration and enlistment office subsequently ended up in the ranks of the army. In Eastern Ukraine—a region that had been largely Russified (present-day Kharkiv Oblast)—this “far from all” was reflected in the following figures: by the end of October 1941, the percentage of deserters among new recruits was 30% according to the Chuguev District Military Commissariat, 35% according to the Stalino District Military Commissariat, and 45% according to the Izyum District Military Commissariat. This is Eastern Ukraine. According to estimates by contemporary Ukrainian historians, the overwhelming majority of those mobilized in Western Ukraine remained in German-occupied territory.

As for desertion directly from military units, in the second half of 1941, NKVD units responsible for protecting the rear were detained 638,000 people suspected of desertion. In total, during the war, 376,000 servicemen were convicted of desertion (according to the same collection, *Classified No Longer*; 35, p. 140). Another 940,000 people were “recalled for a second term of service” (35, p. 338). This peculiar term refers to those Red Army soldiers and commanders who, for various reasons, “lost” contact with their military units and remained in German-occupied territory, and who were called up again in 1943–1944. Among them were not only collective farm workers dressed in soldiers’ rags, but also two generals: Moshenin, chief of artillery of the 24th Army, and Chichkanov, commander of the 189th Rifle Division. At the same time, we must not forget that the original number of those who “went missing” was significantly higher—by no means everyone was able to survive those two or three years of poverty, starvation, shelling, executions, roundups, and bombings...

On page 140 of the collection *Declassified*, the total number of personnel who left the service across all categories—those killed, deceased, missing in action, captured, convicted, and sent to the Gulag (rather than to a penal battalion, which is part of the army), those demobilized due to injury or illness, and “others”—does not match the total number of “personnel who left the Armed Forces for various reasons” listed on the previous page, which is 2,343,000. The authors of the collection themselves explicitly attribute this discrepancy to “a significant number of untraced deserters.”

The Stalinist leadership attempted to stem the flow of deserters by the only method known and available to it—mass executions. In less than four months of the war alone (from June 22 to October 10, 1941), 10,201 servicemen were executed pursuant to the sentences of military tribunals and the Special Departments of the NKVD. In total, over the course of the war, military tribunals alone convicted more than 994,000 Soviet servicemen, of whom 157,593 were executed (118, p. 139). TEN DIVISIONS of executed soldiers!

Everything is relative. German historian Fritz Hahn, based on reports submitted by the Wehrmacht high command to Hitler, cites the following figures. Over the three years of the war (from September 1, 1939, to September 1, 1942), 2,271 servicemen in the multi-million-strong Wehrmacht were sentenced to death, including 11 officers (60). That’s 2 people per day. In the Red Army in 1941, the figure was 92 people per day.

In total, over the four years of the war (from September 1, 1939, to September 1, 1944), 7,810 soldiers and officers were executed in the Wehrmacht—twenty times fewer than in the Red Army. No, these aren’t just different numbers or different quantities. They reflect a fundamental difference in the nature of society and government.

There is no war without casualties, without the dead, without the wounded. And without prisoners of

war. No one has ever managed to organize military operations in such a way that not a single soldier or unit would find itself helpless, surrounded, and without weapons or ammunition. Even in the Wehrmacht, despite all the German organization and love of order, during the first three years of World War II (until September 1942), the total number of missing and prisoners of war reached 69,000. On average, that's 2,000 people every month. These figures are based on German records, which may be underestimated.

According to data from the Soviet General Staff, during the first year of the war (until July 1, 1942), the Red Army captured 17,285 enemy soldiers and officers. In the summer of 1944, during a massive and brilliantly executed offensive operation by Soviet forces in Belarus (Operation Bagration), the German Army Group Center was virtually completely defeated. About 80,000 Wehrmacht soldiers were taken prisoner by the Soviets at that time.

Everything is relative. What happened to the Red Army in the summer and fall of 1941 defies all conventional understanding. History had never seen anything like it. Let's open the statistical compendium *Declassified* once more, this time to pages 234–246. There we find data on the losses of the active fronts in 1941. What makes these pages unique is that the figures (I ask you, dear reader, to set aside for a moment the tragedy behind these numbers and focus on simple, clear arithmetic) for those killed and missing in action are not combined into a single total using the deceptive letter "and," but are shown separately. For greater clarity, let's summarize the available information in another table.

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Northern Front 148/100 15.1 42.4 42.6

Northwestern Front 270/100 I,7 32.5 55.8

Western Front 1,298/100 8.2 26.3 65.4

Southwestern Front 852/100 7.1 15.7

Southern Front 312/100 10.4 23.6 66.0

[Central Front 143/100 6.4 22.4 71.2

—.— Bryansk Front 198/100 7.2 21.5 71.3 As we can see, with the exception of the far northern flank of the war (the Northern Front), the number of missing in action is 5 to 10 times greater than the number of killed. In other words, it was precisely mass capture and desertion that constituted the main component of the Red Army's irreplaceable losses in 1941. The situation on the Northern Front fits perfectly under the definition of "the exception that proves the rule." Neither the terrain nor the armaments of the impoverished Finnish army allowed it to carry out large-scale operations to encircle the enemy. The fighting took the form of a slow "pushing back" of Red Army units beyond the 1939 border. Even so, during this "pushing back," the Finns took 64,188 Soviet soldiers prisoner (32).

The monstrous figures cited above are significantly underestimated. The reality was even more terrifying and shameful. The fact is that, according to the compilation *The Seal of Secrecy Has Been Lifted*, the total number of missing in action across all fronts in 1941 allegedly amounted to "only" 2,335 thousand people (35, p. 146), whereas, according to reports from the Wehrmacht High Command, the number of prisoners of war alone (excluding deserters, whose numbers the Germans

could not possibly have known) amounted to 3,886 thousand people (including 113 thousand in June and 2,369 thousand in the third quarter of 1941).

Enemy war propaganda? Who knows—the Germans were very precise and cautious on this matter. For example, speaking in the Reichstag on December 11, 1941, Hitler stated that the Red Army had lost 21,000 tanks, 17,000 aircraft, 3,300 artillery pieces, and 3,806,865 prisoners of war (115). As can be seen, the figures for military equipment losses generally do not exceed the official data of modern Russian military history, and the losses of artillery pieces are even lower! A similar figure—3.6 million prisoners of war still alive as of the end of February 1942—is also mentioned in the correspondence between Keitel and Rosenberg, which was confidential and by no means intended for propaganda purposes (74).

By the end of July 1941, the influx of prisoners of war had already exceeded the Wehrmacht's capacity to guard and maintain them. On July 25, 1941, General Quartermaster's Order No. 11/4590 was issued, pursuant to which the mass release of prisoners of various nationalities (Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Balts) began. During the period this order was in effect—that is, until November 13, 1941—318,770 former Red Army soldiers (primarily Ukrainians—277,761 people) were sent home (35, p. 334).

And the Soviet leadership deemed it necessary to respond in some way to such unheard-of behavior on the part of its subjects. On August 16, the famous High Command Order No. 270, "On Cases of Cowardice and Surrender to the Enemy and Measures to Suppress Such Actions," was issued. For greater persuasiveness, Order No. 270 was signed by Stalin, Molotov, Budyonny, Voroshilov, Tymoshenko, Shaposhnikov, and Zhukov. There is hardly an equivalent to such a document in the military history of civilized nations:

"I order:

I. Commanders and political officers who, during battle, remove their insignia and desert to the rear or surrender to the enemy shall be considered habitual deserters, whose families are subject to arrest as the families of deserters who have violated their oath and betrayed their Motherland. All superior commanders and commissars are ordered to shoot such deserters from the commanding staff on the spot.

2. Units and subunits surrounded by the enemy must fight selflessly to the very last moment, protect their equipment as if it were the apple of their eye, and break through to their own lines behind enemy lines, inflicting defeat on the fascist dogs.

Require every servicemember, regardless of rank, to demand that their superior, if their unit is surrounded, fight to the very last moment to break through to their own lines; and if such a superior or a unit of Red Army soldiers chooses to surrender to the enemy instead of organizing a counterattack—destroy them by all means, both ground and air, and to deprive the families of Red Army soldiers who have surrendered of state benefits and assistance...

This order is to be read aloud in all companies, squadrons, batteries, flight units, crews, and headquarters" (6, p. 479).

It is of paramount importance for understanding Comrade Stalin's mindset that in this fundamental order he did not deem it possible or necessary to even mention such lofty motives as "defending the gains of the October Revolution" or "saving humanity from fascist barbarism." He made no mention of

Dmitry Donskoy, Alexander Nevsky, or Russia's thousand-year history. Simply and bluntly, Red Army soldiers were reminded that their families—if they were in territory controlled by the NKVD/All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)—were hostages to their conduct at the front. The threat to destroy those who surrendered "by all means, both ground and air" was no empty threat either. In the fall of 1941, the Soviet Air Force bombed prisoner-of-war camps in the Orel and Novgorod-Seversky areas. It is worth recalling the well-known fact that the Soviet Union refused any cooperation with the International Red Cross, which made it impossible to provide aid—primarily food and medicine—to Red Army soldiers held captive by the Germans.

Alas, even such measures failed to rekindle the "love of the Soviet people for war," as Voroshilov had once extolled. Red Army soldiers continued to lay down their arms and scatter in droves into the forests. Less than a month after the issuance of Order No. 270, on September 12, General Headquarters Directive No. 001919 was adopted, calling for the creation of blocking detachments, with a strength of at least one company per rifle regiment. The opening lines of this Directive read as follows:

"The experience of fighting German fascism has shown that there are quite a few panicked and outright hostile elements in our infantry divisions who, at the very first sign of enemy pressure (emphasis mine—M.S.), throw down their weapons, start shouting 'We're surrounded!' and drag the rest of the soldiers along with them. As a result, the division turns to flight, abandons its equipment, and then begins to emerge from the forest one by one. Such incidents are occurring on all fronts..." (5, p. 180).

By the time this Directive was issued, more than half a million Red Army soldiers and commanders were already in German captivity (1,493,000 as of the end of August). Two days after the adoption of High Command Directive No. 001919, on September 14, 1941, the advance units of the Wehrmacht's 1st and 2nd Tank Groups closed the encirclement of the gigantic Kiev "cauldron." A massive Soviet force of half a million troops ceased organized resistance in less than a week. The Wehrmacht High Command reported at the time that it had captured 665,000 prisoners, 3,718 artillery pieces, and 884 tanks.

October 1941 began with the encirclement of the main forces of the Western, Reserve, and Bryansk Fronts (67 infantry and 6 cavalry divisions, 13 tank brigades) in the two largest "pockets"—near Vyazma and Bryansk. According to the Wehrmacht High Command, 658,000 people were taken prisoner, and 5,396 artillery pieces and 1,241 tanks were captured. The October catastrophe (which cannot in any way be attributed to the "suddenness of the attack" or the notorious "lack of mobilization of the army") far exceeded in scale the rout of the Western Front that took place in June 1941. Another key difference between the Vyazma "cauldron" and the Minsk "cauldron" was the large number of top-ranking generals who were taken prisoner by the Germans. Among them were: Commander of the 19th Army Lukin, Commander of the 20th Army Ershakov, Member of the Military Council of the 32nd Army Zhilenkov, Commander of the 32nd Army Vishnevsky, Chief of Staff of the 19th Army Malyshkin, Chief of Artillery of the 24th Army Mosheinin, and Chief of Artillery of the 20th Army Prokhorov...

Along with prisoners captured in battle (or at least within the combat formations of Soviet troops), in the very first weeks of the war the Germans also encountered a large number of deserters who were rushing to leave their units' positions and surrender to German captivity even before the fighting began. The Wehrmacht even had to set up several special camps to house them. However, a report by the Commission on the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression states that the number of defectors in the Red Army was quite small: "In the first year of the war, no more than 1.4–1.5% of the total number of prisoners of war" (74). Yes, in percentage terms, that is almost nothing. But in absolute

numbers—at least 40,000 people. It is simply impossible to compare this with the number of German defectors—the number of defectors in the Wehrmacht during the first three years of the war was a two-digit number: 29.

The very sound of the word “defector” may conjure up in the reader’s imagination the image of a man running across a field and wailing desperately: “Nicht schießen, Stalin kaputt!” Of course, that did happen at times. But it also happened quite differently. For example, on August 22, 1941, Major I. Kononov, a member of the Bolshevik Party since 1929, a recipient of the Order of the Red Banner, and a graduate of the Frunze Academy, defected to the Germans. He defected along with a group of soldiers from his 436th Rifle Regiment (155th Rifle Division, 13th Army, Bryansk Front), taking the regimental battle standard with him—and even the regiment’s political commissar (!) D. Panchenko. A year later, in September 1942, the Wehrmacht’s “102nd Cossack Division,” formed from prisoners of war under Kononov’s command, numbered 1,799 men (74, 119).

Dozens of pilots defected to the Germans along with their combat aircraft. Later, a “Russian” Luftwaffe aviation unit was formed from these pilots and others held in camps, under the command of Colonel Maltsev. Among them were two Heroes of the Soviet Union: fighter pilot Captain Bychkov and ground-attack pilot Senior Lieutenant Antilevsky. Maltsov himself had once been nominated for the Order of Lenin but fell victim to the wave of mass repressions in 1938 (120).

“Cossack divisions” and the “Russian Luftwaffe aviation unit” were exotic phenomena. A far more reliable, straightforward, and, as a result, more widespread method of utilizing former Soviet personnel was to enlist them in regular Wehrmacht units as so-called “voluntary auxiliaries” (NPG5^Ш§e, or, for short, “Khivi”). Initially, the “Khivi” served as drivers, storekeepers, medics, and sappers, thereby freeing up “full-fledged Aryans” for direct participation in combat operations. Later, as Wehrmacht casualties mounted, the Russian “volunteers” began to be armed. In April 1942, there were 200,000 “Khivi” in the German army, and by July 1943, that number had risen to 600,000. They were particularly numerous in those Wehrmacht units and formations that had passed through Ukraine and the Cossack regions of the Don and Kuban. For example, in November 1942, Paulus’s 6th Army, which was surrounded at Stalingrad, had 5! 800 “Khivi,” and in the 71st, 76th, and 297th Infantry Divisions of that army, “Russians” (as all former Soviet soldiers were called) made up as much as 40% of the personnel! In the summer of 1942, Manstein’s 11th Army had 47,000 “volunteers”. Beginning in October 1943, “Khivi” were incorporated into the standard complement of a German infantry division at a rate of 2,000 men per division (the 74th, 119th, 153rd, and 155th).

Ultimately, the scale of this collaboration with the occupiers—unprecedented in both Russian history and the history of World War II—became so vast that the Wehrmacht High Command created a special post of “Inspector General of Eastern Forces.” In February 1943, under the command of General Kestring, approximately 750,000 people served in the ranks of the Wehrmacht, the SS, and the Air Defense Forces. This figure is cited by foreign historians. Contemporary military historians from the Russian General Staff fully agree with this assessment: “By mid-July 1944, the total strength of the ‘voluntary auxiliaries,’ police, and auxiliary units exceeded 800,000 people...” (3 5, p. 3 8 5). Another indicator of the scale of mass collaboration with the Nazi invaders is the fact that in August 1945, 145,000 people who had served in the “police” and “Khivi” were sentenced to deportation to “special settlements” (118, p. 146). One hundred forty-five thousand were deported—but how many fled westward with the Germans, how many were killed in battle by partisans, how many were summarily executed...

Returning once more to the events of 1941, and by no means claiming absolute accuracy in the figures

(the very nature of phenomena such as desertion and capture precludes the possibility of an exact, name-by-name count), we will attempt to estimate the total number of prisoners and deserters.

On May 1, 1942, Colonel Efremov, head of the Organizational and Accounting Department of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Red Army, signed a report titled “On the Strength of the Red Army, Reinforcements, and Casualties for the Period from the Start of the War to March 1, 1942.” (published with reference to the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense [TsAMO], f. 14, op. 113, d. 1, l. 228–238, in the book by S.N. Mikhalev, Human Casualties in the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945. A Statistical Study. Krasnoyarsk: ROI of the Krasnoyarsk State Pedagogical University, 2000). This crucial document contains many figures (some of which we will discuss below), and it concludes with the following two sentences:

“Taking losses into account, the total strength of the Red Army should be 14,197,000 people.

In fact, according to data from the Personnel Directorate, as of March 1, 1942, the Red Army had 9,315,000 personnel.”

Period. Date. Signature. Colonel Efremov offers no commentary on the unexplained absence of nearly five million (4,882,000, to be exact) military personnel. As for the initial figure of 14,197 thousand people, it was obtained using the “balance method” (a concept familiar to every schoolchild from the example of solving a problem about a pool into which water flows through one pipe and flows out through another), namely:

— the strength of the Red Army at the start of the war (which Efremov puts at 4,924 thousand men)

— the total number of mobilized personnel is added (12,490 thousand, including 11,790 thousand conscripted by the end of 1941)

— and the recorded irrecoverable losses (3,217 thousand men) are subtracted.

It should be noted right away that the number of those mobilized in 1941, as cited in Yefremov’s report, is significantly (by 2.2 million people) lower than the figure given by the authors of the monograph “1941: Lessons and Conclusions.” According to their calculations, a total of 14 million people were mobilized by the end of 1941. (3, p. 110),

Summing the two components (3,217,000 accounted for and 4,882,000 missing in action) of irretrievable losses, we arrive at a total estimate of eight million personnel “casualties.”

This estimate is not inflated, as can be verified by examining the balance of active-duty personnel. According to data cited in Efremov’s report, as of August 1, 1941, the active fronts numbered 3,242,000 men; by December 1, 1941, — 3,267 thousand. As we can see, the total strength of the active army remained virtually unchanged, yet at the same time, military registration and enlistment offices were mobilizing and transferring millions of people to the Armed Forces (between 12 and 14 million in the second half of 1941). In the interior districts (according to Efremov’s report), as of December 1, 1941, there were 4,527 thousand military personnel, i.e., their number had increased by no more than 3 million compared to the start of the war. The rest of the mobilized personnel (approximately 12 – 3 = 9 million) were irretrievably lost at the front.

Irrecoverable losses include those killed in action, those who died of their wounds in hospitals, and

those discharged from the army due to injury (“commissioned out,” as the people used to say). And those missing in action. Yefremov’s report contains neither an exact nor even an approximate breakdown of irretrievable losses across these categories, but it does include one very telling phrase: “The total number of wounded, concussed, frostbitten, and sick (since the start of the war) is 1,665,000; the number of those returned to active duty, according to the Sanitary Administration, is approximately 1,000,000 people.”

It is precisely the data on the number of wounded admitted to hospitals for treatment that are (in the author’s opinion) the most reliable. In the deep rear, the numbers were higher, and records were kept at least twice (both upon admission and upon discharge). Based on the ratio of wounded to killed—which remained very consistent across all 20th-century wars at 3:1—it can be assumed that the figure of 1,665,000 wounded corresponds to approximately 600,000 killed. It is worth noting that this estimate is quite comparable to the number of casualties cited in Krivosheev’s collection (*The Seal of Secrecy Has Been Lifted*): according to reports from unit and formation headquarters as of March 1, 1942, the number of killed (excluding those who died of their wounds in hospitals) amounted to 741 thousand people (casualties for January–February 1942 are calculated here as two-thirds of the casualties for the first quarter of 1942). (35, p. 146).

One million wounded returned from hospitals to active duty; 665,000 wounded servicemen were permanently lost (either died or were demobilized due to their injuries). Thus, even when adding up the total number of RECORDED (let us emphasize this word with three bold lines) irretrievable losses, those missing in action number nearly two million people:

3,217 – 600 – 665 = 1,952.

If we take the number of killed from Krivosheev’s statistical compendium, the total comes to 1,811 thousand.

And another 4,882 thousand military personnel who vanished without a trace in the headquarters’ reports. In total—more than six and a half million people who disappeared into the unknown. That is as many as were in the active army at the start of the war, and twice that number.

But what does “vanished without a trace” really mean? There were no miracles:

— 3.8 million people were taken prisoner by the Germans

— at least 1.0–1.5 million who fell behind their units evaded both the front lines and capture

— the arithmetic difference of 1.0–1.5 million people consists of the wounded, those abandoned during the panicked retreat, and the dead who were not accounted for in reports from the front.

And what is most surprising is that Soviet “historians” never considered these appalling facts to be one of the reasons—even the least significant one—for what they delicately referred to as the “temporary setbacks of the Red Army.” A faulty oil filter on tank diesel engines is cited as a major cause of defeat—much has been written about it—while the embrasures of the pillboxes in the Kiev-Ural defensive line were equipped with outdated shutters—and mountains of paper have been written about that as well. But the fact that millions of Red Army soldiers abandoned their weapons and scattered into the forests—that’s a trifle; it has nothing to do with the history of the war...

HEADLESS

These are the facts. These facts are reliable; there are more than enough of them, and taken together, they allow us to assert that the main cause of the military catastrophe of 1941 lies outside the realm of operational art or weapons technology.

In the briefest terms, the answer to the question of why we were defeated can be summed up in three words: THERE WAS NO ARMY. At the outset of the Soviet-German War, it was not two armies that clashed on the battlefields, but the armed forces of Nazi Germany—organized and functioning like a well-oiled clockwork mechanism—on one side, and an almost uncontrollable armed mob on the other. The outcome of the clash between an army and a mob could not have been any different. Even a vast quantity of top-notch weaponry would not allow a mob to defeat an army. And for its defeat, the disorganized mob would pay with losses far exceeding those of the enemy army. This is exactly what happened in the summer of 1941.

Unfortunately, this conclusion—simple and clear, based on a willingness to look the facts squarely in the face—is still perceived by many readers as “sensational and scandalous.” Alas, the connection to that era has been severed, and what the participants and witnesses of that greatest tragedy understood so clearly must now be “rediscovered.” To illustrate that even members of the first Soviet generation, who grew up under the haze of Stalinist propaganda, retained the ability to think clearly and honestly (an ability largely lost by their children and grandchildren), let us quote an excerpt from M. Koryakov’s book *The Liberation of the Soul*. In 1941, the author was 30 years old; he began the war as a private and ended it as a captain. After Victory Day, he emigrated to the West; the book was published in New York in 1952:

"...About four months ago, the Red Army was stationed along the Neman, Bug, and Prut rivers. The Baltic states, Polesie, Volhynia, Galicia, Bukovina, and Bessarabia had been occupied, annexed to the USSR, and 'liberated,' to use Soviet terminology. Rejoicing in their easy, lightning-fast victories and feasting on the abundant, free provisions of the occupation, the soldiers and commanders of the Red Army were in high spirits. These were “Stalin’s youth,” raised in an artificial, hothouse environment, full of faith in the genius of the “great, wise, and beloved Stalin,” in the “liberating mission of the Red Army,” and in the “invincibility of Soviet arms.”

The war began... The sprouts of faith in Stalin, cultivated in a hothouse environment, proved to be fragile. They withered immediately, as soon as they were touched by the hot, scorching breath of heavy and unsuccessful battles. For decades, Bolshevism had eroded the young generation’s organic, national faith in Russia; now the fierce hurricane of war had blown away their faith in Stalin as well—the soul of the Soviet soldier was left as empty as a hollow shell. Thus began the disintegration of the Red Army.

In July and August—the first two months of the war—new contingents poured into the active army: millions of peasants from Ukraine, the North Caucasus, the Volga region, and Central Russia. Not Komsomol members, but thirty- and forty-year-olds—a new, more deeply rooted segment of the population, barely touched by Bolshevik propaganda or the ideas of “liberating” Europe and waging a war of aggression. These soldiers remembered something else: how, in 1930, the Bolsheviks had ruined individual farms—built by their fathers and grandfathers—seized their horses and cows, and forcibly herded them into collective farms; how, in 1932, entire villages, hamlets, and Cossack settlements were dying out from starvation, overgrown with weeds, and deported to the polar tundra, the sands of Turkestan, and the concentration camps of Kolyma.

The new recruits brought anti-Soviet sentiments to the front, which immediately resonated with the "Stalinist youth," who had been routed at the borders in the early days of the war. It was not merely a resonance but a clear articulation—a direct commitment to defeatism. Having lost faith in Stalin and emotionally devastated, the young people of the "Stalin era" gravitated toward the Germans. "Hiders" began to appear, hiding in cellars and basements. As the German advance swept through, the "hiders" emerged. Former communists and Komsomol members, as a rule, enlisted in the German army. Older soldiers changed into peasant clothes and made their way closer to their home villages to divide up the collective farms and rebuild their individual homesteads. Those who did not have a home village nearby settled in the hut of some village widow or a soldier's wife.

A great military, social, and political—but above all, a profound psychological—national drama was unfolding in the fields of Russia. It is wrong to think that millions of Russians went over to the Germans. Neither to the Germans nor to the Bolsheviks, but simply—wherever their eyes led them...

...No one knew how it would all end. Least of all did they know at the Supreme Headquarters, in the Kremlin. It was obvious that the position on the Lama River—the last waterline before Moscow—would soon be surrendered to the enemy. Not because the position was poor or unsuitable for defense. Even if it had been much better, even if it had met all tactical requirements—it no longer mattered. The trouble was not that the troops were retreating, but that they had scattered..."

As simple and obvious as the immediate cause of the Red Army's defeat is, the answer to another question is just as complex and ambiguous: WHY? Why did the Red Army find itself in such a helpless, incapacitated state? How could this have happened in a state that, to this day, is seen by many as a model of the strictest order and iron discipline? Why did the grandiose military machine of a totalitarian despotism turn, in a matter of days, into a heap of chaotically scattered "cogs and wheels"?

There is no simple, short answer to these questions, nor can there be. Simple arithmetic has run its course, and from here on in our book we will address issues that, going far beyond the scope of military history as such, require us to turn to social psychology and political science—that is, to disciplines that, by their very nature, do not allow for precise, quantitative assessments.

First among the reasons that determined the Red Army's negligible combat effectiveness as of June 1941 is the extremely low quality of its command staff.

War veteran Colonel T.G. Ibatullin writes in his book:

"The morale of a combatant depends first and foremost on the answers to three questions:

— What is the purpose of the war? Is it just and legitimate?

— Is my commander capable of organizing the battle in such a way as to accomplish the mission with minimal losses?

— Am I confident in my own preparation for action in a combat situation?" (74).

While the answer to the first question is determined by the policies pursued by the country's top leadership, the answers to the second and third questions depend not on "high government circles," but on the company sergeant major, the battalion commander, and the division commander. It is they who

must transform a crowd of armed men into a combat-ready army. It is they who must “organize the battle with minimal losses,” and to do so, they must train their subordinates day and night, preparing them for “operations in a combat environment.”

The level of professional training among the Red Army’s command staff and the quality of military training for rank-and-file soldiers—all of this is a subject for a separate, serious study. Experts who undertake the task of thoroughly and impartially investigating this issue will greatly advance our understanding of what happened in 1941 and the years that followed. By no means considering himself competent in such purely military matters, the author feels it possible to note only a few facts that lie, as they say, on the surface.

“One must be extremely ignorant or a blind, fanatical patriot not to acknowledge that all our military resources and our notorious, supposedly countless army are nothing compared to the German army.” Such “Russophobic” thoughts were expressed more than a century ago by the famous anarchist M. Bakunin. What great virtues did he see in the German army? Here they are:

“...The German military has a tremendous advantage—German officers surpass all other officers in the world in their theoretical and practical knowledge of military affairs, their ardent and thoroughly pedantic devotion to the military craft, their precision, meticulousness, composure, steadfast patience, and also their relative honesty. As a result of all these qualities, the organization and armament of the German armies exist in reality, and not merely on paper, as was the case under Napoleon III in France, and as is all too often the case here...”

The German Marxist F. Engels fully agreed with the Russian anarchist’s opinion:

“...The Russian soldier is one of the bravest in Europe... And yet the Russian army has little to boast about. Throughout the entire history of Russia as such, the Russians have not yet won a single battle against the Germans, French, Poles, or English without significantly outnumbering them. Under equal conditions, they have always been defeated...” (122, p. 480).

F. Engels can hardly be considered a military expert, much less an impartial one (Engels’s critical attitude toward Russia and the Russians—to put it mildly—was a secret known only to Soviet communists). However, even impartial facts show that after the triumph of 1812, Russia demonstrated, with depressing consistency, an inability to translate the courage, patience, endurance, and self-sacrifice of the Russian soldier into military victory. The Crimean War, in which the (theoretically) massive Russian army faced a small landing force of Western allies, ended in a crushing defeat. The war with Japan (1904–1905) ended in an equally crushing—but even bloodier and more costly—defeat. World War I, during which the Russian army suffered greater human losses than its Western allies, ended in victory for the Allies, but for Russia—it meant a series of heavy defeats on the front, a growing economic crisis at home, the collapse of the state, and, finally, the “Treaty of Brest-Litovsk,” whose terms differed little from a surrender.

In short, in the military sphere, the Bolsheviks inherited a far from enviable legacy. Not only that, but they themselves went out of their way to squander and waste this “legacy.” The Bolsheviks exterminated almost all of the career officers of the Russian army who had not perished in the battles of the Civil War and had not managed to emigrate. They were mercilessly shot in 1918–1920; several thousand former officers were arrested in 1929–1931 as part of the Cheka’s largest operation, “Spring”; and the few who survived were finished off during the Great Terror of 1937–1938.

And so, starting from a “clean slate”—one drenched in the blood of the commanders of the old Russian army—Stalin began to train a new generation of military leaders. To be fair, the Master did his best. He pampered and cherished the army’s top brass, showering them with honors and privileges. The level of material and social comfort enjoyed by the “Red commanders” far exceeded anything available to a highly qualified engineer or doctor (not to mention a destitute collective farmer or a half-starved worker living in a factory barracks). The costs were high. The results, however, were far worse.

In any country and throughout history, a military career has been one of the ways for a young man from a simple, poor family to “make something of himself.” The trouble is that in the Soviet Union, this path became virtually the only one, and coming from a family of “the poorest peasant” became an indispensable condition for a successful career. As a result, there were far too many people eager to rise “from rags to riches” without doing anything, without learning anything, without taking real responsibility for anything—merely by agreeing to wear government-issued boots and a greatcoat. They viewed their command posts as a winning lottery ticket, guaranteeing a lifetime of comfort and a carefree existence. Alas, for these former village riffraff—who possessed neither wit, nor education, nor aristocratic honor, nor proletarian “revolutionary consciousness”—the abundant food (and even more abundant drink) had a thoroughly corrupting effect.

"...The club’s luxurious hall was bathed in dim light. A large rotating ball suspended from the ceiling scattered a multitude of specks of light throughout the hall, creating the illusion of falling snow. Men in uniforms and tuxedos and women in long evening gowns or operetta costumes whirled about to the sounds of jazz. Many of the women wore masks and exquisitely picturesque costumes rented from the Bolshoi Theater’s costume department. The tables were groaning under the weight of champagne, liqueurs, and vodka... A certain colonel in the border troops shouted in drunken ecstasy: “This is the life, guys! Thanks to Comrade Stalin for our happy childhood!”

This is how the famous Chekist who never returned—Orlov (Feldbin), the NKVD resident in Spain—describes the ball at the NKVD club that took place in 1936. Of course, there were other commanders as well, and they were trying to shout about something entirely different. For example, on October 7, 1930, Commander-in-Chief I.P. Belov of the Belarusian Military District, who had been on an official business trip to Germany, wrote from there to Voroshilov, the People’s Commissar of Defense of the USSR:

“...When you see how brutally German officers—from second lieutenants to generals—discipline themselves, how they work on training their units, and what results they achieve, it pains me to the core to realize our own weakness. I want to shout at the top of my lungs about the need for the most intense training—a decisive overhaul of all weak commanders...” (71, p. 272).

Belov was executed. And he was not the only one. A detailed examination of the causes, design, and course of the Great Terror goes far beyond the scope of our narrative. We will note only a few points directly relevant to the topic of this chapter.

One of the most widespread myths is that by the mid-1930s, highly professional and (which is completely inexplicable) “experienced” military personnel had been trained, and that only “the repressions of 1937 deprived the army of its command staff.” There is no point in arguing about this issue. One simply needs to know the facts. Over the course of two years (1938–1939), the Red Army received 158,000 commanders, political officers, and other military specialists. Over the three prewar years (1939–1941), 48,000 people graduated from military academies, and 80,000 completed advanced training courses. In the first half of 1941, another 70,000 officers were assigned to the troops from

academies and military schools. As of January 1, 1941, the total authorized strength of the command and staff of the army and navy was 579,581 personnel. In addition, over a four-year period (from 1937 to 1940), 448,000 reserve officers were trained (150).

According to various authors, no more than 10,000 commanders and political officers were arrested in 1937–1938 (1, p. 368). As for those who actually perished during the years of repression, the most comprehensive list by name, compiled by O. Suveniryov, consists of 1,634 names of commanders who were shot or tortured to death during "investigations" (149). Without attempting in the slightest to justify this most heinous crime or to whitewash the leaders and direct perpetrators of the bloody terror, one must nevertheless acknowledge the obvious fact that
if all those who perished had survived, the total number of Red Army commanders would have increased by only 0.3 percent.

The rather modest shortage of command personnel (13% as of January 1, 1941) was caused not by repressions at all, but by a threefold increase in troop strength over three years and a massive expansion of the Armed Forces' technical capabilities. Finally, it is worth recalling once again that the notorious "shortage" is merely a discrepancy between actual and authorized strength. And staffing ratios can vary widely. For example, in the Wehrmacht, the standard ratio was 29 soldiers and noncommissioned officers per officer; in the French army, 22; and in the Japanese army, 19. Only in the Red Army was there one officer (political officer) for every six soldiers and sergeants (1, p. 365). It cannot be said that this "surplus" of commanders in the Red Army led to greater order.

"I fought in the war of 1914–1917," wrote Colonel Tetushkin, commander of the 141st Rifle Division, to Malenkov, secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), on July 10, 1942. "There were two people at the regiment headquarters: the regiment commander and his aide-de-camp; at the division headquarters, there were three or four—and that was it. Now we have dozens of people at the regiment commander's command post, hundreds at the division commander's command post, and in the army or at the front—I can't even say—there are crowds of them. What's more, they all drive around in cars; they'll show up, deliver some little note, and then crash at headquarters for a week. And the enemy's rear echelon and headquarters staff is at least ten times smaller than ours..."

The claim that in 1937 "the very best were executed, and good-for-nothings and scoundrels were appointed in their place" is based on nothing but unsubstantiated assertions. If we judge by such a formal criterion as educational level, then from 1937 to 1941 the number of officers with higher and secondary military education not only did not decrease but actually increased significantly (doubling) from 164,000 to 385,000. In positions from battalion commander and above, the proportion of commanding officers without military education on the eve of the war was only 0.1% (1, p. 366). Among division commanders as of January 1, 1941, 40% had higher military education, and 60% had secondary military education. Among corps commanders, the figures were 52% and 48%, respectively (68).

Another question is what the "efficiency ratio" of this training was, given that the Frunze Military Academy admitted commanders who had completed only two grades of parish school. Unfortunately, there is no exaggeration in these words. It was with precisely this kind of "education" that People's Commissar of Defense Voroshilov and his successor, People's Commissar Timoshenko; Zhukov, commander of the most powerful Kiev Military District; and his successor in that post, Kirponos, rose to the very top of the military hierarchy. Against this backdrop, Zhukov's predecessor as Chief of the General Staff, Meretskov, looks downright intellectual—he had completed four grades of rural school

and attended an evening school for adults in Moscow.

Incidentally, the situation was exactly the same in the civilian administration. In the mid-1930s, 70% of the secretaries of the district and city committees of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (VKP(b)) had only a primary education. M.M. Kaganovich served as People's Commissar of the Defense (and later Aviation!) Industry, yet his biography reveals no trace of any formal education whatsoever. Let us cite another example from a later period. In April 1948, among the 171 military commandants in East Germany (and one must assume that the officers selected for such a position were the most "reputable" in every respect), 108 had only a primary education, 52 had a secondary education, and only I officers had a higher education (74, p. 65).

It was by no means the repressions of 1937 that caused this deplorable state of affairs. The recruitment of semi-literate but "socially compatible" personnel was the foundation of personnel policy in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. For some reason, it is commonly forgotten that a considerable number of so-called "experienced military commanders, heroes of the Civil War" safely survived 1937 and entered 1941 holding the highest ranks. These included Marshal Timoshenko, People's Commissar of Defense; his deputies, Marshals Budyonny and Kulik; Marshal Voroshilov, Chairman of the Defense Committee under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR; General of the Army Tyulenev, Commander of the Moscow Military District (and, from the start of the war, the Southern Front); and Colonel General Gorodovikov, Commander-in-Chief of the Cavalry... All of them were men of the same generation, from the same political and life school as the repressed Blücher, Yegorov, Tukhachevsky, Dybenko, and Fedko. They all "distinguished" themselves so "brilliantly" that, just six months to a year after the war began, Stalin had to send them—just to be on the safe side—deep into the rear. By the final, victorious stage of the war, hardly anyone in the active army even remembered these ill-fated commanders.

Why, then, knowing how the survivors proved themselves, do we continue to harbor illusions about those who were executed? Why is it commonly believed that Tukhachevsky's execution demoralized the army to a greater extent than the mass executions of Tambov peasants carried out in the summer of 1921 on Tukhachevsky's own orders? Finally, were the so-called "victims of 1937" themselves courageous military commanders (and for a military leader, a lack of personal courage is nothing less than a sign of professional unfitness), or were they merely obese bureaucrats in the military department?

Among the several hundred top commanders of the army and the NKVD (each of whom had a security detail, a personal weapon, and a network of secret agents), not a single one dared to stage a "minor mutiny" or even offer armed resistance upon arrest. Only a few dared to engage in passive resistance (escape): Lyushkov, head of the Far Eastern NKVD, and Orlov, the NKVD resident in Spain, fled abroad, while Uspensky, the chief Chekist of Ukraine, remained in hiding for several months. All the rest meekly went to their deaths, dutifully "denouncing and exposing" their arrested comrades; at best, they shot themselves in the forehead.

I. Yakir, a First-Rank Army Commander and commander of the troops of the Kiev Military District, who was sentenced to execution for crimes he knew he had not committed, wrote to Stalin from his prison cell: "My dear, close comrade Stalin! I die with words of love for you..." On June 1, 1937, speaking at a meeting of the Supreme Military Council, Stalin said regarding Y. Gamarnik, the head of the Red Army's Main Political Administration who had shot himself: "If I were in his place, I would have asked for an audience with Stalin, first shot him, and then killed myself." What lay behind these words? Mockery? Provocation? The cry of a tormented soul, weary of dealing with petty people?

As is well known, there was nothing in the German Armed Forces comparable to the repressions against the Red Army's senior command—and this at a time when Germany was undergoing a radical change in its ruling elites. And this was despite the fact that the senior generals allowed themselves to openly defy the corporal who had become Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Was the incredible (by Comrade Stalin's standards) tolerance shown by Hitler a manifestation of wise foresight—or did the Wehrmacht's command structure simply not allow the "Führer" to treat them any other way?

Of course, the mass repressions had a negative impact on the Red Army's combat effectiveness, and it was enormous. Mass repressions, mass denunciations, and the mass transformation of yesterday's heroes into "enemies of the people, despicable spies, and saboteurs" undermined the very foundation of army morale: the commander's unquestionable authority. The army is held together by a single chain of command, but this chain of command cannot be ensured solely by the commander's right—as provided for in the Regulations—to "use force and weapons" against a disobedient subordinate. On the battlefield, fear of the commander will be immediately swept away by fear of an armed enemy. A subordinate must respect his commander and believe that the commander is capable of "organizing the battle in such a way as to accomplish the mission with minimal losses." What kind of trust could there be in an army where a military leader of any rank could be reduced to "camp dust" by a single anonymous denunciation...

The most paradoxical phenomenon of the Red Army must be acknowledged as the fact that even the most brutal repressions did not in the slightest contribute to establishing reasonable order, discipline, and a minimum level of organization.

"Top Secret. NKO Order No. 0049 of September 17, 1940.

...An investigation has established that, due to gross violations of NKO orders, a number of crimes have been committed in several headquarters regarding the accounting and storage of secret documents...

1. Major K., Chief of Staff of the Barabash Fortified District, left a safe containing documents of particular importance open and unsealed; it remained in this condition for 10 days. The state of affairs at the Barabash Fortified District headquarters is so deplorable that none of the headquarters officers, including those on duty, took any measures to close and seal the safe over the course of 10 days. (It should be clarified that in this case, the phrase "of special importance" is not a figure of speech but a technical term. According to the classification adopted by the Red Army, the "of special importance" category included the most secret documents among those classified as "top secret." A strict 15-page set of instructions was developed regarding the procedure for drafting and storing "documents of special importance." In particular, these documents were not to be handed over even to superiors in rank or position—they were to be delivered only personally to the person to whom the document was addressed. The document had to be handwritten personally "on a firm surface that leaves no pen mark"; all drafts and blotting paper had to be destroyed with a written record; the document had to be stored in a sealed safe located in a room with a sealed iron door and steel bars on the windows...)

2. Upon departing for a new location, the headquarters of the 135th Rifle Division left mobilization documents behind—unhanded over to anyone and unguarded—in an open wooden cabinet in the supply room.

3. In the units and formations of the Transbaikal Military District, a shortage of 59 secret and top-secret

documents was discovered...”

^Top Secret. Order of the People’s Commissariat of Defense No. 0031 of May 31, 1941.

...in the 23rd Aviation Division (Moscow Military District—M.S.)

there was a shortage of aviation fuel until May 10, as a result of which the aircraft were unable to take to the air for several weeks... Combat bombs were dropped at a railroad unloading yard, where they lay under the snow for a month and a half...

...in the 24th Fighter Aviation Division (Moscow Military District), from October 1940 until recently, not a single exercise on coordination with air defense units had been conducted, not a single air raid alert involving fighter sorties had been carried out, and the coordination of fighters in the air with the air defense command post had not been practiced at all...”

“Top Secret. Report by Comrade Semina, an officer of the Main Control Directorate of the Defense Committee under the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR, addressed to the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, Comrade Molotov, dated July 9, 1940.

...On June 17, we discovered the 235th Separate Construction Company, which had been idle for three months—that is, it was not building anything and was not conducting any training exercises with its troops. Upon closer examination, it became clear that the Leningrad Military District headquarters was unaware of this company’s existence and had not assigned it any tasks. On June 19, between Vyborg and Terioki, 300 meters from the Vyborg Highway, we also discovered the 1st Airfield Construction Battalion (430 men), which had likewise been doing nothing for three months... Despite the fact that the battalion is stationed on the shore of a lake, all the Red Army soldiers, the commanders, and especially the commissar, Comrade Ts., are exceptionally dirty...

...At the train stations in Leningrad, especially at Moskovsky and Finlandsky, there are a great many Red Army soldiers who have fallen behind their units (the war with Finland ended on March 13, i.e., four months before the date of this report. — M.S.) are walking around dirty, unshaven, and in winter uniforms...”

Now let’s move from the dry language of official documents to some very vividly written memoirs:

“...Training began. For my unit, I selected eleven strapping young men—Red Army soldiers ranging in height from 175 to 180 centimeters. And we got started... Drill training, political classes, cleaning weapons, and marching in formation along the surrounding roads, singing songs... And so it went every day, for a whole month... There was just one thing that bothered me: my commanding voice wasn’t quite as good as the others’. I just couldn’t get it right: “Rrr—yas, rrr—yas, ryas, a—a, three—and ~ and...” Or “Pad-y-may-s!..” No, I just couldn’t pull it off.

And so I decided to follow Demosthenes’ example: I began regularly retreating to the hills to shout there! To shout—with all my might, loudly, wildly—then recite poetry, shout out commands, individual words, sing...

...After a brilliant victory in drill training, I had a new concern. Now I had to report to the commander every time “in full uniform.” And that meant—with a saber and spurs. Another problem! I put on the saber once and nearly fell over: it got tangled between my legs... To live up to my reputation as the best

drill sergeant, I still had a lot of work to do on my own, and every morning in my office I trained diligently...”

Dear reader, what do you think THIS is about? This is the twice Hero of the Soviet Union, the remarkable fighter pilot, Air Marshal E.Y. Savitsky, who recounts with enthusiasm in his memoirs how, in the spring of 1941—when there were only a few days left before the war began—he spent an entire month mastering that very “rrr—yas, rrr—yas, ryas, a—a, tri—i—i...” And what position did 28-year-old Captain Savitsky hold in the spring of 1941? The answer is: he commanded the 29th Fighter Aviation Division. And who is that idiot—I can’t think of a better word—who, in the spring of 1941, distracted the commander of an aviation division with a drill and song competition, and then even demanded that he walk around the airfield in spurs and with a saber? It was the commander of the Far Eastern Front, a hero of the Civil War, Army General Apanasenko. They say he was one of Budyonny and Timoshenko’s best comrades-in-arms...

Of course, alongside the idiots, there were also talented, responsible commanders in the Red Army who “worked brutally hard on themselves” and used every hour for combat training of the units entrusted to them. If it weren’t for such commanders, the Germans would have advanced all the way from Brest to those Far Eastern hills, among which Captain Savitsky (though not of his own volition, to be sure) shouted: “Lady-y-mais!” In previous chapters, there have been numerous references to the 1st Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade, which, amid the general chaos and panicked retreat, held back the advance of German tanks toward Lutsk and Rivne. Turning to the memoirs of Marshal K.S. Moskalenko, former commander of the 1st Anti-Tank Artillery Brigade, we discover that the brigade’s successful combat operations were not the result of mere luck—the brigade had a commander who trained his subordinates not for a military song contest, but for war:

“...The schedule was designed to provide intensive combat training: 8–10 hours a day, as well as 2–3 night training sessions a week... From reveille to lights out, Red Army soldiers and junior commanders saw their immediate superiors right beside them. Commanders and political officers of all ranks taught by personal example, using the very simple but always effective “do as I do” method...”

...Firearms training sessions were interspersed with marches, field exercises involving numerous scenarios, digging trenches, changing firing positions, and live-fire drills. Training took place day and night, in all weather conditions... The soldiers and commanders became convinced of the power of their guns and that, in the event of an attack by modern German tanks, their armor would certainly be penetrated by our shells. This confidence, which emerged after the gun crews began to operate in unison, hitting targets at the firing ranges without a single miss, was of paramount importance. After all, the first condition for success in battle is belief in one’s own strength...”

And what is truly surprising is that Moskalenko’s brigade was even found to have 76-mm armor-piercing shells (“we were fully supplied with shells, including armor-piercing ones”). It was like another world—the tank divisions of the assault mechanized corps had no 76-mm armor-piercing shells at all; generals wrote (and modern historians readily repeat) pitiful reports about the lack of armor-piercing shells, yet Moskalenko had shells, targets, and firing ranges... It remains only to add that the formation of the 1st PTAB began in early May 1941, and there was less than two months for combat training. Meanwhile, a hundred kilometers from the 1st PTAB’s location, other units were being deployed, whose commanders later wrote in their reports:

“...The howitzer artillery regiment did not have time to conduct a single live-fire exercise... The personnel were not prepared for firing in field conditions... There were no training manuals or

demonstration models... Almost all of the regimental artillery sent to the regiments was inoperable... The anti-aircraft artillery had an extremely limited number of shells... The artillery regiment consisted of 12 guns without elevation mechanisms... The personnel of the motorcycle regiment were untrained and had never even fired a shot...”

A feature of Stalin’s totalitarian regime that defies comprehension was the complete absence of a unified, universal order—even though the very word “totalitarian” implies unification and uniformity. We would probably not be far off the mark in assuming that what was universal and pervasive in Stalin’s empire (and in the Red Army, as its most important component) was disorder, interrupted by order only in a few fortunate instances. Moreover, this order was ensured not by the state system of power and administration, but by the personal enthusiasm, personal conscientiousness, and personal initiative of individual commanders.

At dawn on June 22, 1941, the war began. Not just another “liberation campaign,” but a real, major war. And it was precisely then that Comrade Stalin was confronted with a stunning surprise—it turned out that many of his generals, colonels, and lieutenant colonels had not even given a thought to what it meant to have the right to to drink and not work—a professional soldier must pay—pay with the willingness to give his life at any moment for the country that had granted him these rights and privileges.

“...On June 24, in the Klevana area, we rounded up a large number of so-called soldiers, among whom there were quite a few officers. Most of these people were unarmed. To our shame, all of them—including the officers—had removed their insignia. In one such group, my attention was drawn to an elderly man sitting under a pine tree, who, in his appearance and demeanor, bore no resemblance to a soldier. A young nurse was sitting next to him. Addressing those seated (seated before the general—M.S.), and there were at least a hundred of them, I ordered the officers to come forward. No one moved. Raising my voice, I repeated the order a second and third time. Again, the response was silence and immobility. Then, approaching the elderly “surrounded man,” I ordered him to stand up. I then asked what his rank was. He squeezed out the word “colonel” so indifferently and yet with such brazen defiance that his appearance and tone literally infuriated me. Pulling out my pistol, I was ready to shoot him right there on the spot. The colonel’s apathy and bravado vanished in an instant. Realizing how this might end, he fell to his knees and began begging for mercy...”

This is an excerpt from Marshal Rokossovsky’s memoirs. By the third day of the war, a group of former commanders of the 5th Army of the Southwestern Front had already managed not only to lay down their arms but also to tear off their insignia. Is it worth generalizing about individual shameful episodes? Of course not. One need only review Order No. 044, signed on July 26, 1941, by Lieutenant General Sobennikov, commander of the Northwestern Front:

“In a number of units on the front, certain commanders and political officers are grossly violating the basic principles of Red Army discipline. They do not comply with the prescribed uniform regulations; their overcoats and undershirts lack epaulets, sleeve insignia, and rank insignia...

I hereby order:

1. Commanders and military commissars of formations and units shall require all commanders and political officers, under their personal responsibility, to sew epaulets, sleeve insignia, and rank insignia onto their overcoats and undershirts within three days. The Military Commissar of the Northwestern Front shall ensure that formations and units are supplied with all necessary insignia.

2. Henceforth, all officers who violate dress regulations or remove their insignia are to be regarded as cowards and panic-mongers who dishonor the high rank of a Red Army commander, and they are to be held strictly accountable, up to and including trial by military tribunals.

3. Commanders and military commissars of formations and units shall make it clear to all commanders and political officers that such violations of dress regulations are absolutely unacceptable, and shall ensure that the commanding officers take a zero-tolerance stance toward violators" (195).

The order is unprecedented, not only in content but also in form. In a normal, combat-ready army, such an order would have named the specific surnames of those few scoundrels among the command staff who had been executed by firing squad following a military tribunal's verdict for having removed their insignia in a combat situation. But, as is clear from the order of the commander of S-3, f., this disgraceful phenomenon had reached such proportions that it was no longer possible to execute all the "officers without insignia." It is not even possible to sew on the torn epaulets faster than in three days. Moreover, General Sobenikov, in his order, euphemistically refers to the actual preparation for desertion and surrender to the enemy as merely a "violation of uniform regulations."

In the first six months of 1941, sixty-three generals were taken prisoner. And during the entire war—79 generals (we have not included in this list Generals A.B. Shister, M.O. Petrov, F.D. Rubtsov, I.A. Laskin, and F.A. Semenovsky, who were held captive for only a few hours or days).

Of course, not all cases of captivity are the same. The author in no way advocates lumping everyone together. Many generals (Lukin, Karbyshev, Tkachenko, Shepetov, Antyufeyev-Lyubovtsev, Melnikov, and others—about twenty in all) were captured by the enemy while wounded and helpless. Many of those who were taken prisoner subsequently rejected the enemy's attempts to persuade them to collaborate and were shot or tortured to death by the Nazis. This is how Generals Alaverov, Ershakov, Karbyshev, Makarov, Nikitin, Novikov, Presnyakov, Romanov, Sotensky, Starostin, Tkachenko, Tkhor, and Shepetov. Several men (Generals Alekseev, Ogurtsov, Sysoev, and Tsirulnikov) escaped captivity, crossed the front line, or joined partisan units (20, 124).

All of this is true. Another part of the bitter truth is that most of the captured generals had forgotten that their personal weapons had been issued to them not only to drive their subordinates into battle. Today's humanitarians, who call for putting oneself in the "plight of defenseless generals," would do well to remember that every commander who surrendered to the enemy thereby doomed thousands of his own soldiers and handed hundreds of thousands of civilians over to the fascists to be torn to pieces. And the degree of responsibility for the defeat of the army and the ruin of the country must, without a doubt, differ between a mobilized collective farm worker and a general showered with all the blessings of life (whom the state had granted the right to decide over the life and death of thousands of such workers).

Twenty-three former Red Army generals were shot or hanged after the war for voluntarily surrendering to the enemy and collaborating with the occupiers (not counting those who received full prison terms for treason). Among them were commanders of very high rank:

— Trukhin, chief of the operations department of the Northwestern Front headquarters;

— Vlasov, commander of the 2nd Shock Army;

— Malyshkin, Chief of Staff of the 19th Army;

— Zhilenkov, a member of the Military Council of the 32nd Army;

— Yegorov, commander of the 4th Rifle Corps (Western Front);

— Zakutny, Commander of the 21st Rifle Corps (Western Front);

— Artemenko, commander of the 27th Rifle Corps (Southwestern Front).

Yes, ten of the executed generals were posthumously rehabilitated in the late 1950s. But we must not forget that the rehabilitations of the 1950s were carried out according to the very same rules as the repressions of the 1930s: by list, without any objective investigation, and on the direct orders of the "directing authorities"... The fate of Lieutenant General M.F. Lukin serves as a highly revealing example both for assessing the manner in which the cases of the captured generals were investigated and for understanding the mindset of the Red Army's top command in 1941.

An outstanding military commander and hero of the battles at Shepetovka, Smolensk, and Vyazma, he was taken prisoner after being seriously wounded and while unconscious (his leg was amputated in a German hospital). During a special investigation, certain facts regarding his "anti-Soviet activities" were uncovered, but on August 31, 1945, in a report addressed to Stalin, the head of SMERSH, Abakumov, wrote: "Given that he was left disabled as a result of his injury, I would consider it appropriate to release him and place him under intelligence surveillance" (124).

Subsequently, General Lukin slowly but surely became a poster child for the unyielding hero who, while in German captivity, "rejected all the enemy's promises and threats with contempt." Lukin was awarded the Order of Lenin (1946), two Orders of the Red Banner (1946, 1947), and the Order of the Red Star (1967). He was conferred the title of "Honorary Citizen of Smolensk," and a street in that city was named after him. A legend began to circulate from one publication to another about how Stalin told the general, upon his return from captivity: "Thank you for saving Moscow." Finally, in 1993, General Lukin was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of Russia.

By this time, the transcript of the interrogation dated December 14, 1941—long known to Western historians—had been translated into Russian and published. During that interrogation, the captured General Lukin had the following conversation with the Germans:

"...The Communists promised the peasants land and the workers factories and plants, which is why the people supported them. Of course, this was a terrible mistake, since today the peasant, compared to the past, has absolutely nothing, and the average worker's salary is 300–500 rubles a month, with which he cannot buy anything. When there is nothing to eat and there is a constant fear of the system, then, of course, Russians would be very grateful for its destruction and for being rid of the Stalinist regime....

If an alternative Russian government were to be established after all, many Russians would consider the following: first, an anti-Stalinist government would emerge that would stand up for Russia; second, they would be able to believe that the Germans are truly fighting only against the Bolshevik system, and not against Russia; and third, they will see that there are Russians on your side as well who are not fighting against Russia, but for Russia. Such a government could become a new source of hope for the people...

If Budyonny and Tymoshenko lead the uprising, then perhaps not much blood will be shed. But they,

too, must be certain that Russia and a Russian government will exist... The new Russia does not necessarily have to be like the old one. It could even exist without Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states (of course, the discussion was not about granting independence, but about transferring these parts of Stalin's empire to German occupation. — M.S.), while maintaining good relations with Germany..." (173).

Judging by his actual actions, Comrade Stalin realized quite quickly that in the prewar years he had made a major mistake in the delicate matter of selecting, deploying, and eliminating personnel, and he tried very hard to make amends. But how? Like a prisoner searching his entire cell in the hope of finding a lost cigarette butt, he shuffled and reshuffled his generals in the hope of finally finding the one who would perform a miracle, "turn stones into bread" and force the destitute collective farmers to fight for "the mother party and its great leader."

During the first four months of the war, the commander of the Western Front was replaced seven times on the main strategic front (Pavlov, Eremenko, Timoshenko, Eremenko again, Timoshenko again, Konev, Zhukov). The commander of the 21st Army (on that same western front, during the same period) was replaced six times (Gerasimenko, Kuznetsov F.I., Efremov, Gordov, another Kuznetsov V.I., Gordov again). Things were not much better for the 21st Army's neighbors. There were five commanders in the 20th Army (Remezov, Kurochkin, Lukin, Ershakov, Vlasov), four commanders in the 13th (Filatov, Remezov, Golubev, Gorodnyansky), and three commanders each in the 19th and 22nd Armies over the summer and fall of 1941.

Army commanders appeared and disappeared, without even having time to get to know their new subordinates. Quite quickly, a certain universal rule emerged from this chaos. It required neither familiarity with subordinates, nor reconnaissance of the enemy, nor knowledge of military technology. It completely superseded all the subtleties of tactics and the art of operations. It thundered and roared through all the headquarters, trenches, and dugouts.

AT ANY COST!

And to top off this rule—a sly self-justification: "War will excuse everything."

And everything was written off. Or even held up as a model of "unbreakable courage and heroism." Take, for example, the infamous "Nevsky Patch." And yet it really is the most striking example. But of what?

In the fall of 1941, after the blockade of Leningrad was established, we were left with a tiny bridgehead on the left (southern) bank of the Neva. A patch of land measuring 2 by 3 km. Holding the bridgehead (even at the cost of heavy losses) makes tactical sense only if a large-scale offensive is planned to be launched from that territory in the near future. The French term "bridgehead" literally means "a place for an army." On the "Nevsky Patch," it was possible to deploy an infantry battalion, or at most a regiment. Moreover, breaking through the encirclement was to be achieved primarily by a strike from the outside, not from the direction of the city, which was dying of starvation. The "Nevsky Patch" could not play (and in fact did not play) any significant role in breaking the blockade in January 1943. Nevertheless, orders were given to hold this "bridgehead." At any cost. And it was held. For 400 consecutive days. German artillery pounded every meter of this enormous mass grave. The total number of soldiers wiped out in that cursed place is estimated by various researchers to be between 50,000 and 100,000...

Let’s be honest—at times, even the highest leadership of the Red Army expressed its outrage at such a practice of squandering “manpower.” Stalin himself once demanded that his generals “learn to fight with minimal bloodshed, as the Germans do” (telegram to the command of the Southwestern Front dated May 27, 1942). And even the “bloody” Marshal Zhukov (at that time commander of the Western Front) signed a directive on March 30, 1942, which began with the following words:

“The Supreme Command Headquarters and the Front’s Military Council are receiving numerous letters from Red Army soldiers, commanders, and political officers, testifying to a criminally negligent attitude toward preserving the lives of Red Army infantrymen. The letters and accounts cite hundreds of examples in which unit and formation commanders are causing the deaths of hundreds and thousands of men during attacks on the enemy’s undestroyed defenses and undestroyed machine guns, on unoverrun strongpoints, and during poorly prepared offensives. These complaints are undoubtedly justified and reflect only a part (emphasis mine—M.S.) of the prevailing reckless attitude toward preserving reinforcements...” (117, p. 238).

Alas, such directives were of little use—primarily because Zhukov himself and his closest associates, both before and after issuing this directive, were wasting tens and hundreds of thousands of lives in “poorly prepared offensives.” Here is how Colonel A.K. Kononenko describes in his memoirs the visit of General G.F. Zakharov, deputy commander of the Western Front (i.e., Zhukov’s deputy), to the headquarters of Belov’s legendary 1st Guards Cavalry Corps:

“...Malice clouded his already not very clear mind. Zakharov spoke, sometimes raising his voice, sometimes lowering it to a whisper with a sort of serpentine hiss; malice seethed and bubbled within him... “I was sent here,” said Zakharov, “to ensure the mission is carried out by any means necessary, and I will make you carry it out, even if I have to shoot half your corps to do so. The only question is how to carry out the mission, not what is necessary to carry it out”...

He summoned the commanders of the regiments and divisions attacking the highway to the phone one by one, and, hurling the most vile insults at them, shouted: “If you don’t break through the highway today, I’ll have you shot!” He ordered that five commanders, whose troops had failed to break through the highway, be tried and immediately executed... “This man, who had become a military commander by mistake, was by nature destined to be either an executioner or a patient in a psychiatric hospital...” (163).

Communist propaganda historians had already concocted a very plausible excuse for the Zhukovs and Zakharovs: “The country was on the brink of destruction; the fate of the entire world was at stake; ruthless treatment of their own soldiers was justified and necessary...”

It sounds nice. Perhaps it is time to ask a counterquestion: Was it not this thoughtless ruthlessness on the part of the command that drove millions of soldiers to desert and surrender to the enemy? Was it not this that brought the country to the brink of ruin? And weren’t there other, far more base motives hidden behind this concern for the “fates of the world”?

Let’s look at two more documents. These are orders issued by Marshals Konev and Zhukov on the same day in April 1945. The country was no longer on the brink of destruction. It was on the threshold of its greatest triumph. Not only the “fate of the world,” but also the postwar borders in Europe had already been drawn up and agreed upon in Tehran and Yalta. In this context, on April 20, Konev issued the following order:

“To the Commanders of the 3rd and 4th Guards Tank Armies. Marshal Zhukov’s troops are 10 km from the eastern outskirts of Berlin. I order you to be the first to break into Berlin tonight without fail. Report on execution...”

Zhukov’s order was slightly more detailed:

“To the Commander of the 2nd Guards Tank Army. Send one of the best brigades from each corps to Berlin and assign them the following task: no later than 4:00 a.m. on April 21, break through to the outskirts of Berlin at any cost and immediately report this to Comrade Stalin and announce it in the press...” (74).

Why send only one brigade per corps? That way, it would be faster to “report to Comrade Stalin” and go down in history as the “great Marshal of Victory.” Why faster? Because the corps and the tank army as a whole are “burdened” by artillery, engineer units, and motorized infantry. They slow down the advance. That is why Zhukov knowingly sends his two best brigades to their deaths. Why? For an “announcement in the press”?

This heartless and ruthless squandering of “manpower” naturally went hand in hand with the savage, primitive style of relations within the army’s top command itself. In the letter to Malenkov mentioned above, the commander of the 141st Rifle Division describes the nature of “cooperation” between senior officers and the commanders under their command as follows:

“...The Army Commander, or his Chief of Staff, or even the Chief of the Operations Department, calls the division commander and his Chief of Staff on the phone and yells: ‘You bastard, you idiot... damn you..., why can’t your regiment take that village? I’ll come today and have you all shot.’ Of course, none of them had visited us in six months (emphasis mine—M.S.), but they’d “shoot us” over the phone up to five times a day. In what army have such relationships existed or do they exist? This toxic atmosphere trickles down; there’s nothing but profanity all around… The commander of the 33rd Army even slapped commanders in the face, and for no reason at all…”

This statement about physical altercations among high-ranking officers—which seems unbelievable at first glance—was not evidence of an event unique to the Red Army. Red generals, among those whom “nature had destined” to be the leaders of a gang of thieves, simply knew no other way to lead:

“...Without asking any questions, Eremenko began accusing the Military Council of cowardice and treason against the Motherland. When I pointed out that such serious accusations should not be made, Eremenko lunged at me with his fists and struck me several times in the face, threatening to have me shot. I declared that he might shoot me, but he had no right to humiliate the dignity of a Communist and a deputy of the Supreme Soviet. Then Eremenko drew his Mauser, but Efremov’s intervention prevented him from firing.

After that, he began threatening to shoot Efremov. Throughout this disgraceful scene, Eremenko hysterically shouted insults. Having calmed down somewhat, Eremenko began boasting that, allegedly with Stalin’s approval, he had beaten several corps commanders and smashed one of their heads...’

The letter to Stalin cited above was written on September 19, 1941. The disgraceful scene took place at the headquarters of the 13th Army, where the commander of the Bryansk Front had arrived. But perhaps Efremov and the author of the letter, Ganenko, a member of the army’s Military Council, had indeed committed offenses so grave that they deserved to be shot—albeit in a more lawful manner, that

is, through a tribunal? No, judging by subsequent events, Eremenko immediately decided to make peace with the "traitors" he had exposed: "Sitting down to dinner, Eremenko forced Efremov to drink vodka with him, and when the latter refused, he began shouting insults, claiming that Efremov was in opposition to him and could not serve as his deputy..." (117, p. 162).

For some reason, Stalin was fond of General Eremenko. He forgave him not only for such trifles as instilling the mores of the criminal underworld in the troops, but also for the rout of the Bryansk Front (a rout that served as a prelude to the encirclement and destruction of the Southwestern Front in the Kiev "pocket"). Later on, it was Eremenko who became the general to whom Stalin traveled to the front for the first and only time during the entire war.

At that same time, in the fall of 1941, Stalin responded to a letter from Commissar Ganenko by issuing Order No. 0391 dated October 4, 1941. The order was titled "On the Substitution of Repressive Measures for Educational Work." Alas, not all of Comrade Stalin's orders were carried out. Just two months later, on December 12, 1941, Marshal Timoshenko issued Order No. 0029 to the troops of the Southwestern Front, "On Cases of Abuse of Authority, Unauthorized Executions, and Physical Abuse." The order noted that not all commanders "had strictly complied with Comrade Stalin's order and drawn practical conclusions from it." Moreover, unauthorized executions "were carried out while under the influence of alcohol, in full view of the Red Army troops and the local population..." (68).

Every coin has two sides. The attitude toward people as the cheapest "consumable material," deeply ingrained in the minds of many commanders, was quite appropriately complemented by the Red Army soldiers' indifference to their statutory duty to protect their commander in battle. Unfortunately, this is by no means a matter of isolated, shameful incidents. The scale of commanders' disappearances without a trace in the Red Army is staggering. In just four years of the war, in the Ground Forces alone (i.e., excluding air force commanders who did not return from combat missions), the following went missing: 163 division (brigade) commanders, 221 division (brigade) chiefs of staff, and 1,114 regimental commanders (35, p. 319).

Even by the early 1990s (a quarter-century later), the burial sites of forty-four Red Army generals remained unknown (126). This does not include those who were executed or died in prisons and camps, nor those who perished in captivity! Forty-four generals—including two dozen corps and army commanders—shared the fate of ordinary soldiers who vanished without a trace in the maelstrom of that terrible war.

There were many soldiers; the Red Army numbered in the millions. Soldiers often fight alone and die without witnesses. That is why the large number of soldiers who were not given a proper burial, if not justified, is at least understandable. But how can a general, a corps commander, or a division commander simply vanish without a trace? A commander does not fight alone. The division's command and staff numbered 75 people (according to the April 1941 organizational chart). This does not include the personnel of the political department, the court-martial, and the commandant's platoon. There were even more people in the corps and army headquarters. To what extent must the moral decay of the Red Army have reached for the fallen generals to be left abandoned in an open field, without a trace or any sign...

"I KNOW OF NO OTHER COUNTRY LIKE THIS..."

Even in countries with a stable, centuries-old democratic tradition, entering a world war led to a rise in authoritarian tendencies, significant restrictions on citizens' rights and freedoms, and a weakening of

public oversight of government activities. But in the Soviet Union, everything was exactly the opposite. It is an incredible fact that it was precisely with the outbreak of war that a real opportunity for CHOICE opened up for millions of people.

Until that fateful day, June 22, 1941, Soviet citizens could not express their views on the government—neither through a ballot (there was not even a faint semblance of fair elections in the USSR), nor through free speech in an independent newspaper, nor by leaving the country (any attempt to leave the borders of the "state of workers and peasants" was considered a crime and was quite officially, in accordance with the letter of the Criminal Code, termed "escape").

In the summer of '41, something unprecedented happened—before the eyes of the stunned population, the doors of the deserted district and city party committees stood wide open, cars carrying party and military "leaders" fleeing in panic, and plaster busts of the beloved "leader of the peoples," lying in the dust amid other debris—torn party membership cards and thick volumes of the works of the Marxist classics.

During those mad days, everyone could make their own personal choice, a choice free from fear of the "beloved Party" and its "armed detachment" of glorious Chekists. No, there was no mass anti-Stalinist uprising. There were neither rallies nor "soldiers' committees." The silent majority (and in our country it was especially silent) of Red Army soldiers silently dropped their rifles, silently climbed out of the hated steel box of the tank, tore off their epaulets, and joined one of the huge columns of prisoners of war who, escorted by a dozen German guards, trudged westward. In every city, town, and village, during the few days of "anarchy" (as a rule, two to three days passed between the moment the party leadership fled and the arrival of the German military administration), all the stores were looted. If this was a revolt, it was a senseless and pitiful one—a "revolt on its knees."

And could one really have expected anything else from people who had to endure what the Soviet people endured during twenty years of the Bolsheviks' cannibalistic rule?

In the 20th century, in the age of aviation and radio, in a country with vast tracts of the most fertile land, the Bolsheviks revived cannibalism on a scale that Stone Age cannibals could never have imagined.

This is not a metaphor, but a simple statement of fact. The savage cruelty of Stalin's regime was by no means the result of the new leaders' evil sadistic tendencies. Nothing of the sort. Their heads were cold, their hearts were made of stone, and they understood perfectly well what they were doing and why. Even in relatively prosperous, bountiful years, the actual marketability of Russian peasant farms did not exceed 15–20 percent. This means that it took five or six peasant households to feed a single urban worker's family. Of course, such proportions could not satisfy Comrade Stalin, who had set out to create a massive army and arm it with the latest technology in the shortest possible time. And so the Bolshevik regime consciously and cold-bloodedly traded several million human lives for American tractor (and tank) factories, French aircraft engines, and German machine tools.

In 1930, the government confiscated 30% of the grain from collective farms in Ukraine and 38% in the North Caucasus. The following year, the figures were 42% and 47%, respectively. The 1932 quota exceeded the 1931 figures by 32%. Moreover, when it became clear in the fall of 1932 that the procurement quota could not be met even through the complete confiscation of all grain (including seed stocks), the enraged Kremlin leaders demanded that the collective farms that had failed to meet the grain procurement plan surrender their so-called "non-grain food resources": lard, potatoes, onions,

beets, and pickles (129, 131).

It is highly doubtful that, given the infrastructure for transportation, storage, and processing of agricultural products that existed at the time, even a small portion of the confiscated food ever made it to factory cafeterias. In fact, this was “terror by starvation.” Once again, the Bolsheviks heeded the commandment of their leader and teacher (“Teach them a lesson so that for several decades they dare not even think of any resistance”). And in Ukraine, on the Don, and later in the Volga region and Kazakhstan, a mass famine began. The Holodomor. To escape starvation, millions of peasants traveled, walked, or crawled to the cities. The authorities reacted quickly. On January 22, 1933, a decree of the USSR government, signed by Molotov and Stalin, was issued:

“...The Central Committee and the Government have evidence that the mass exodus of peasants is being organized by enemies of Soviet power, counterrevolutionaries, and Polish agents... The mass movement of the peasantry of Ukraine and the North Caucasus into the cities is to be prohibited by all possible means...” (129, p. 170).

Areas doomed to starvation were cordoned off by troops. In the very first month of this “quarantine,” the OGPU reported the detention of 219,460 people! The Italian consul in Kharkiv reported to his superiors in Rome:

“...Within a week, a service was established to round up abandoned children... At midnight, they were taken by truck to the freight station on the Seversky Donets... where medical personnel were on hand to sort them. Those who had not yet swollen from starvation and might survive were sent to barracks on Golodnaya Gera or to barns, where another 8,000 souls—mostly children—died on straw. The weak were sent out of town on freight trains and left to die far from people. Upon the arrival of the railcars, all the bodies were unloaded into large pits dug in advance... Every night in Kharkiv, 250 corpses of those who died of starvation or typhus are collected. It has been observed that a large number of them are missing their livers, which are used to make pastries and sold at the market...” (129)

The Holodomor of 1933 differed in two fundamental ways from the famine of 1921.

First, it was an artificially orchestrated massacre, whereas the famine of 1921 was caused by “natural” factors (if the ruin and collapse of the national economy as a result of the war unleashed by the Bolsheviks can be considered a “natural” process). The 1932 harvest was indeed poor, but it was by no means the poor harvest itself that caused the deaths of millions. For example, in Ukraine alone, 36.5 million centners of grain were collected through state grain requisitions (123). Given that two centners of grain per year are sufficient to feed one person, we conclude that the Ukrainian state requisitions alone were enough to provide a loaf of bread to 18 million starving people. And how much grain simply rotted due to a lack of covered storage areas and elevators, how much was distilled into vodka...

Second, good old Grandpa Lenin did, after all, allocate some funds for purchasing food abroad. Comrade Stalin EXPORTED 17.3 million centners of grain from the starving country in 1932 and 16.8 million centners in 1933 (132). In that very same year, when pies filled with human flesh were being baked in Kharkiv, 47,000 metric tons of meat and dairy products and 54,000 metric tons of fish were shipped from the USSR for export; the country of cannibals exported flour, sugar, sausages, sunflower seeds... (132).

The exact figures characterizing the scale of this crime, unprecedented in history, will never be revealed. According to the most conservative estimates by the Soviet Ukrainian historian S. Kulchitsky

(in modern Ukraine, significantly higher figures are cited), in 1933 alone and in Ukraine alone, 3–3.5 million people died of starvation (131). During those years, Kazakhstan's population declined from 6 million to 3 million (74). In the Volga region, there was no "confiscation of non-grain resources" (i.e., the collective farmers were allowed to keep their potatoes and pickled cucumbers after all). As a result, "only" 400,000 people died of starvation there.

The "enemy" that the Bolsheviks fought against—the largest in number—was the economically independent peasantry (and therefore potentially dangerous to dictatorial power), which by 1917 constituted four-fifths of the country's population. But the new regime did not forget the urban population either.

From February 1930 to December 1931, more than 1.8 million people—so-called "declassed elements and violators of passport regulations"—were deported from major cities (129). This definition applied not only to bourgeois professors and engineers, not only to homeless peasants who had fled collective farm famine to the city, but also to urban workers who were caught in a roundup on the street without a passport in their pocket.

Archival documents record instances when people with passports were also arrested—simply to inflate the numbers in the report; there is an account of a district police chief who was deported from Moscow as a "violator of passport regulations" after he had the misfortune of leaving his home without a passport or his official ID in his pocket...

Those deportees who were particularly lucky faced forced labor on the "great construction projects of communism." For example, in September 1932, 42,462 "special settlers" lived in Magnitogorsk, accounting for two-thirds of the population of this "city of dreams," celebrated in poetry and prose. But such good fortune was by no means reserved for everyone.

"...On April 20 and 30, 1932, two trains carrying 'declassed elements'—a total of 6,144 people—were dispatched from Moscow and Leningrad to a labor settlement... Upon arriving in Tomsk, this group was transferred to barges and taken to Nazino Island... On the island, there were no tools, no buildings, no seeds, and not a crumb of food... On May 19, snow fell, the wind picked up, and then a frost set in... People began to die. During the first 24 hours, the burial crew managed to bury 295 bodies. It wasn't until the fourth or fifth day that rye flour arrived on the island, and they began distributing it in portions of a few hundred grams. Upon receiving the flour, people rushed to the water and, wearing hats, footcloths, jackets, and pants, mixed up a gruel and ate it. At the same time, a vast majority of them simply ate the flour, collapsed, and choked to death... Soon, cannibalism began on a terrifying scale... As a result, of the 6,100 people who had arrived from Tomsk, only 2,200 were still alive by August 20..." (129, p. 162).

These are excerpts from a report by an instructor of the Narym City Party Committee to the West Siberian Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (VKP(b)). Judging by the final statistics, the nightmare on Nazino Island was by no means an isolated incident. During the very first re-registration of "special settlers," conducted in January 1932, a loss of 500,000 people was identified—those who had died or fled (to certain death) into the taiga.

Mass repressions and the Holodomor of 1929–1933, alongside simple, prosaic, "economic" objectives (to supply the growing industry with ultra-cheap labor and free agricultural products, and to amass gold and foreign currency for the purchase of Western technology), were also aimed at resolving a highly complex social problem. The new ruling class, from top to bottom, was filled with people who had

firsthand experience Experience in organizing uprisings, coups, partisan units, “Red Guards,” and so on. This experience and the very presence of these people could not fail to trouble the party leadership. And only after the dekulakization and collectivization were Stalin and his associates able to breathe a sigh of relief. Now they knew—for the “activists” who had scooped porridge from the pot for the starving, there was no way back to the plundered people, nor would there ever be. Bound together by a collective responsibility for immeasurable villainy, they could now only meekly trudge along the winding “party line.”

In January 1934, S. Ordzhonikidze—dearly beloved by our “liberals of the 1960s”—wrote to S.M. Kirov, whom they loved even more: “The cadres who went through the situation of 1932–33 and weathered it have been tempered like steel. I believe that with them we will be able to build a state the likes of which history has never seen.” Prophetic words. Deeply true. Russian history had never seen anything like this before. And in the old days, in old Russia, one would have had to search long and hard to find such “cadres” who could unload children swollen with hunger into the barren steppe day after day.

Unfortunately, neither the author of the letter nor its recipient lived to see June 1941, and therefore did not witness how these “hardened cadres” behaved in the face of an armed enemy.

Meanwhile, during the “peaceful interlude” that dragged on for many years (which for ordinary people turned out to be far more terrifying than an imperialist war), the new elite of the “proletarian state” did not waste any time.

“I got married in June 1929... A fairy-tale life, a fairy tale... An apartment on Manezhnaya Square, across from the Kremlin. Six rooms... I used to go out for lunch... They brought it in thermoses—it didn’t get cold, since it was so close to the Kremlin, and our car always had the green light everywhere... The dinners were delicious, the chefs were wonderful; nine people could have been fed by these dinners meant for two... With the dinners, we were always given half a kilo of butter and half a kilo of black caviar... Along with the meal, you could take deli meats, sweets, and alcohol... Red, yellow, and white vodka. In little decanters... Wonderful pork chops...” (130, p. 154).

These are the memoirs of a wife—not even the wife of a boss, but merely the wife of the son of a former Politburo member, Kamenev, who by that time had already fallen from grace. He ate those “Kremlin cutlets”—a vivid metaphor for his future fate—in a modest six-room apartment. The current bosses, close to the Master, were “morally degenerating” on a much grander scale. Thus, on February 3, 1938, the Politburo adopted yet another resolution, which noted that “a number of arrested conspirators (Rudzutak, Rosengolts, Antipov, Mezhlauk, Karakhan, Yagoda, and others) had built themselves grandiose dacha-palaces with 15–20 rooms, where they lived in luxury and squandered public funds, thereby demonstrating their complete moral decay and degeneration.”

Alas, Stalin’s struggle against the “decadents and degenerates” was about as effective as trying to pull oneself out of a swamp by one’s own hair. If not dachas, not palaces, and not vodka—“red, yellow, white, in little decanters”—then what else could he offer his comrades-in-arms? The dream of a world revolution had been banished along with Trotsky, and even the Master himself could not offer the rabble—who had risen “from rags to riches”—the idea of universal equality and brotherhood. All that remained for him was to shoot some “red boyars” to intimidate the others. Many years later, the surviving children and grandchildren of the repressed leaders instilled in gullible descendants the idea that the main victims of the Great Purge were the Bolsheviks of the “Leninist Guard,” the courageous military commanders, and the wise ministers. If only...

In 1937–1938, the NKVD arrested more than 1.5 million people, of whom 680,000 were shot, and 115,000 died under torture during “investigations” or perished in prisons and camps (196). Where, then, could one find so many generals, Bolsheviks of the “Leninist Guard,” and Chekists of the “Dzerzhinsky School”? We would probably not be far off the mark if we assumed that for every “loyal Leninist,” there were a hundred innocent peasants, workers, engineers, and doctors who were needlessly destroyed... But the world is such that even one hundred thousand collective farmers cannot draw as much public attention to their family’s tragedy as a single heir of a Politburo member can.

By early 1939, the executions of senior officials had declined sharply, while repression against workers and collective farmers was on the rise. The year 1940 set a record for the number of people convicted—2.3 million. It is noteworthy that in that year, “political” prisoners accounted for only 25–30% of the total number of those repressed. Guided by common sense, one might assume that the remaining 70% were criminals. But that is not the case. Of course, there were criminals, but the vast majority of Gulag prisoners were people who had fallen victim to the criminal methods of the leadership, legitimized by Stalin’s gang (it is important to note that 57% of all those in the Gulag were serving sentences of less than 5 years). People were imprisoned for being 30 minutes late to the workbench, for breaking a drill bit due to inexperience (or because of unrealistic production quotas), for being born in “liberated” Eastern Poland or Bessarabia, or for a distant relative abroad foolishly sending a postcard...

On the eve of the war, in January 1941, there were 1,930,000 convicts held in the Gulag camps, another 462,000 people were in prisons, and more than 1,200,000 were in “special settlements.” Total: 3.6 million. The total for the prewar “seven-year period” was 6 million people who had been behind bars between 1934 and 1941 (129). And when, on July 3, 1941, his jaw trembling as he clinked it against the rim of a glass of water, Stalin addressed his “brothers and sisters,” he knew that practically every one of the “citizens” he had humiliated, robbed, and deceived had a father, brother, son, or friend who had been shot, thrown into prison, or exiled to Siberia for hard labor...

One of the most famous mantras used by communist “historians” to explain the Red Army’s defeat in the summer of 1941 went like this: “History gave us too little time.” That is not true.

That ill-fated “history” granted the Stalinist regime an unacceptably long time. It had two decades at its disposal to destroy all moral and legal norms and to spiritually corrupt the peoples of Russia. Beginning in the fall of 1939, more and more “liberated territories” began to be incorporated into Stalin’s empire, and along with these territories came a multiethnic local population numbering in the millions. There was indeed very little time for “re-education” of this population (the Great War was drawing nearer with each passing day), which is why the Party and the NKVD worked with redoubled energy in occupied Eastern Poland and the Baltic states.

The well-known Chekist Sudoplatov writes without the slightest embarrassment in his memoirs:

“...In Lviv, the atmosphere was strikingly different from the situation in the Soviet part of Ukraine. The Western capitalist way of life flourished in Lviv; wholesale and retail trade was in the hands of private entrepreneurs, who were soon to be eliminated...” (162).

They cracked down quickly and decisively. Forced collectivization in the countryside, extrajudicial confiscation of private property in the cities, the dissolution of all political, social, cultural, and educational organizations, and the persecution of believers (especially Catholics and Uniates with ties to the West). The vigilance of the Chekists went so far that they took the trouble to read through

thousands of essays written by graduates of Polish schools—in order to identify those who were “very smart and well-educated,” whose families were the first to be loaded onto freight cars bound for Siberia... (129).

By the most conservative estimates, more than 400,000 residents of the annexed territories were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan simply by decision of local “administrative bodies.” Sometimes, one must assume—as a form of black humor—people born in Poland, who had never even heard of Trotsky, were taken from their homes on the basis of the Order of the NKVD of the USSR dated July 30, 1937, as “family members of Trotskyists and saboteurs” (161). In total, from September 1939 to February 1941, 92,500 people were arrested by the NKVD/NKGB in the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus. Among them were 41,000 Poles, 23,000 Jews, 21,000 Ukrainians, and 7,500 Belarusians (160). As we can see, there was no discrimination based on nationality; everyone was arrested and shot.

In particular, in Western Belarus, the Chekists managed to uncover a certain “Jewish-fascist organization of a pro-British (!!!) orientation….”

The Sovietization of the Baltic states followed the same pattern, but took place even more rapidly. The only difference was that while in occupied Eastern Poland it was mainly the affluent minority that suffered, in the Baltic states the transition to Soviet currency, Soviet prices, and Soviet wages led to the impoverishment of the majority of workers, artisans, office workers, and peasants.

A few weeks before the war, the scale of repression increased significantly. By June 1941, the total number of people arrested in the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus had risen to 107,000. In Latvia, with a population of two million, between June 14 and 17, 1941, alone, (arrested or exiled); and in the three Baltic states combined, 14,467 people were arrested and 25,711 were deported during those days (155, 160, 161). It should be noted that even these figures represent the lowest estimates found in the literature.

As a result of such persistent “work with the population,” the western regions of the USSR—the rear area of the Red Army’s future military operations—began to turn into an active front, long before June 22, 1941.

Reports from the headquarters of the NKVD’s internal troops during the prewar period mention dozens of armed gang formations that had been crushed (or were under “operational investigation”), as well as virtually constant firefights, acts of sabotage, and seizures of weapons and explosives. The situation was particularly tense in the western regions of Ukraine, where partisan units of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) were active; these units had accumulated considerable combat experience over years of terrorist warfare against the Polish authorities. A careful reading of the memoirs of Soviet commanders reveals that no recollections by the “liberators” of Western Ukraine fail to mention this topic. From the multitude of examples, we will select two related to the same city, Kovel.

Hero of the Soviet Union and outstanding fighter pilot (467 combat sorties, 30 enemy aircraft shot down personally) F.F. Arkhipenko began the war with the rank of second lieutenant in the 17th Fighter Aviation Regiment. The regiment was based at the Lyubitov airfield near Kovel. In his memoirs, Arkhipenko writes:

“...I recall that before the war, commanders from other units would often go missing in those parts, and since we were outside military territory, we had to be vigilant... In the spring of [194] on assignment

from the commissar, I had the opportunity to deliver a speech dedicated to Red Army Day in one of the villages near Kovel... During the speech, several shots rang out beneath the windows. It is possible that peasants dissatisfied with Soviet rule (the collective farms) decided to test the moral fortitude of the Red Army in practice, using me as their test subject.

After the speech, there was dancing; I also asked some girls to dance and joined in, though I kept glancing around to make sure I wasn't shot... The atmosphere was quite tense, and it occurred to me that it would be best to get out of there quickly, while I was still alive. Although they invited me to stay the night, I insisted on leaving and took a cab to Kovel, keeping my pistol at the ready in my coat pocket the whole way..." (59, p. 25).

Colonel Fe-Duninsky, commander of the 15th Rifle Corps, arrived in Kovel in April 1941. He describes the situation in the city as follows:

"...The wives of the commanders in Kovel, Lviv, and Lutsk were told almost openly: 'Just wait! The war is about to begin—the Germans will show you...'"

The war began at dawn on June 22. The first shots of the war that Colonel Fedyuninsky heard were fired by Ukrainian nationalists:

"...While issuing the necessary orders to the units, I heard several pistol shots echoing through the quiet night streets. A little later, the duty officer at headquarters reported that the car he had sent for me had come under fire on its way back to headquarters, and the driver had been wounded... Exactly the same thing happened to the chief of staff, Major General Rogozny. Like me, after receiving a call from the duty officer, he set off for headquarters on foot, and the car sent to pick him up was also fired upon.

...In Kovel, where the corps headquarters was still located, the situation was tense. Provocative raids by the Bandera followers had intensified. Gunfire broke out in one part of the city after another... By the evening of June 28, the gunfire—which had not subsided in the city itself in recent days—had intensified. I was informed that the Bandera followers had blown up the bridge over the Turya River, cutting off our retreat..."

The fire of rebellion was raging throughout Western Ukraine. And not only in the West. For example, in the account of the combat operations of the 32nd Tank Division (4th Mechanized Corps), we read: "By the evening of July 6, 1941, the division had approached Starokostiantyniv, but was unable to enter the city due to panic and unrest there." Starokostiantyniv is located in the Proskuriv (now Khmelnytskyi) Oblast. This is the "old Soviet" part of Ukraine. And even there, the "unrest" proved so intense that the commander of a tank (!!!) division did not dare to enter the city. Meanwhile, in the regional capital itself, as reported by Mikhailov, head of the Political Propaganda Directorate of the Southwestern Front, "after the district and regional leaders fled the city in panic, the power plant was blown up and the water supply system was destroyed. Our units that had withdrawn to Proskuriv were left without electricity or water..." (68).

The main events unfolded in Lviv—the historic center of Galicia. Fighting in the city began in the very first days of the war. Here is how N.K. Popel, commissar of the 8th Mechanized Corps, describes the events of June 24:

"...The motorcycle regiment had to carry out a task uncharacteristic of it—fighting in attics. It was there that the observation and command posts of the enemy sabotage groups (this is how Popel, subject

to internal self-censorship, refers to the Bandera followers), their firing positions, and ammunition depots were set up. The enemy monitored our every move, while we could not see them, and reaching them was no easy task. The skirmishes were fierce... It was impossible to tell who was on our side and who was the enemy—everyone wore the same Red Army uniform. It was no easy task to restore order on Lviv's main thoroughfare either..." (105).

The situation that developed in the first days of the war in the Baltic states can be described as nothing other than a large-scale armed rebellion.

By 1941, the Latvian paramilitary organization "Aizsargs" (founded as early as 1919) had up to 40,000 members in its ranks. In Lithuania, the underground "Front of Lithuanian Activists" was established on November 17, 1940; by the spring of 1941, its combat units numbered 35,000 people. In a report dated May 21, 1941, German military intelligence noted with deep satisfaction:

"...The uprisings in the Baltic states have been prepared, and they can be relied upon with confidence. The underground insurgent movement is progressing to such an extent that it is proving difficult to prevent its participants from taking premature action..." (155).

The "time bomb," meticulously crafted through the joint efforts of Stalinists and Nazis, exploded on June 22, 1941. Before the Wehrmacht's advance units entered Kaunas, control over the city was established by a certain "Lithuanian commandant's office" headed by Colonel Bobyalis of the former Lithuanian army. On June 23, a "Provisional Government" was formed in Kaunas, and on June 27, the restoration of the government and legislative bodies of an independent Lithuania was announced (26, p. 130). One eyewitness to the events testified:

"...The Soviet leaders in Lithuania were the first to rush away in their cars, followed by the police forces, thereby giving free rein to the counterrevolutionary gangs in Lithuania... Kaunas and all of Lithuania were left without civil authorities for several days. On June 23 and 24, the counterrevolution organized combat units, even recruiting fifth-grade high school students..." (155, p. 386).

It is more difficult to escape from Riga (the capital of Latvia)—the city is situated on the shore of a sea bay. Perhaps this is why full-scale street fighting broke out in the city. In a document titled "A Brief Description of the Combat Operations of the 5th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the NKVD Troops," the situation in the city is described as follows:

"...Hostile elements were spreading panic in the army's rear and demoralizing the work of headquarters, government agencies, and Soviet institutions... The enemy set up machine guns and submachine guns on church bell towers, towers, attics, and in the windows of houses, and fired on the streets, the buildings of the Northwestern Front headquarters, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, the telegraph office, and the train station..."

On the night of June 24, a group of insurgents stormed the house where employees of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia lived. The scale of this nighttime battle in the capital can be gauged by the fact that "during the battle, 128 attackers were killed and 457 were taken prisoner" (155, p. 404). On June 28 (troops of the German Army Group North did not occupy Riga until June 30), the rebels seized the Riga radio station and announced the establishment of the "Provisional Government of Latvia"... (26, p. 207).

Such was the ultimate result of the Soviet state's "wise domestic and consistently peaceful foreign"

policy. The territories of Eastern Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Bessarabia, annexed in 1939–1940, turned into a trap for the Red Army. It was not only the active army units that fell into this trap; the families of the Red Army's commanding officers also found themselves caught in this deadly snare.

The families of the commanding officers. This is yet another bloodstained—and carefully forgotten—page in the history of the war's early days. Amid the chaos and confusion of the first few days, the families of the command staff found themselves in cities and towns engulfed by "unrest" of such intensity that even tank divisions (recall the 4th and 8th Mechanized Corps) could barely break free from there. This tragedy was utterly unprecedented—nothing of the sort had ever happened in any country that had entered the war against Hitler's Germany. Neither in France, nor in Belgium, nor in Poland, nor in Norway were army commanders and their young children shot at from every attic and alleyway. Why people were shot in the Red Army's operational rear is clear: in the Baltic states and Western Ukraine, the war began more as a "small civil war" than as the "Great Patriotic War," and both sides in such a war acted without mercy. The question is another: how did the families of the command staff end up in the territories "liberated" in 1939–1940?

With very few exceptions, the wives (and certainly the children) of Red Army commanders were not natives of the western "annexed" territories. They arrived there together with their husbands, who were military personnel. Virtually all of them had parents, brothers, and sisters who remained in the east. An organized, timely evacuation of the families of military personnel from the zone of future combat operations was entirely possible. Moreover, there was a precedent for such "separation" of families. On December 22, 1940, the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR issued Order No. 0362, pursuant to which "pilots, navigators, and aircraft technicians, regardless of their military ranks, who had been in the ranks of the Red Army for less than four years" were transferred to barracks duty. Paragraph 7 of the order stated:

"...The families of flight and technical personnel being transferred to barracks status are to be removed from military towns by February 1, 1941. The evicted families are to be sent back to their hometowns or relocated to local urban and town housing stock outside the aviation unit's area of deployment..." (17, p. 202).

Free train tickets were issued for the families' travel, along with a "settlement allowance" ranging from 2,000 to 3,500 rubles (depending on family size). This was a considerable sum, considering that the average industrial worker's salary at the time was 350–400 rubles.

It is noteworthy that the preamble to the order stated:

"...In the current international situation, fraught with all manner of surprises, the transition from peacetime to wartime is but a single step. Our air force, which will be the first to engage the enemy, must therefore remain in a state of constant mobilization readiness... The task of training pilots who are fully prepared for combat is incompatible with the current situation, in which pilots are overburdened by family responsibilities... Nowhere in the world are there such arrangements whereby pilots live in apartments with their families and aviation units resemble semi-civilian settlements. To tolerate this situation any longer means jeopardizing the combat training of our pilots, the strengthening of our air force, and the defense of our country..." (17, p. 201).

Words of wisdom. But if in December 1940 the situation was assessed as "fraught with all manner of unexpected developments," and for that reason even in distant Siberia or Kazakhstan pilots were transferred from their family homes to barracks, and their families were "sent back to their homeland"

at the state's expense, then what prevented similar measures from being taken with regard to all the families of the command staff stationed in the western districts at the very moment when German troops were already removing the barbed-wire barriers along the border?

There is no rational answer to this question. Of course, Stalin's voluntary defenders will argue in this case as well that the families of the command staff were not evacuated in advance so as "not to give Hitler a pretext for an attack." It's pointless to argue about this, and, to be honest, I'm tired of it. In May and June 1941, tens of thousands of railcars carrying people, tanks, artillery, and ammunition raced westward, disrupting schedules on all the railroads of the Soviet Union. What other "pretexts" did Hitler need? The scale of the Red Army's strategic deployment that had begun was so vast that Stalin no longer even tried to deny it. Instead, on June 13, 1941, in the famous "TASS Communiqué," a rather clumsy attempt—clearly intended to fool the gullible—was made to offer Hitler a reassuring explanation of what was happening:

"...the summer training exercises currently being conducted for Red Army reservists and the upcoming maneuvers are intended for nothing other than training the reservists and testing the railway system..."

In such a situation, the departure of several thousand women and children to the east would have made no difference whatsoever.

Most likely, this reflected the self-absorbed arrogance of the Kremlin rulers (they planned to wage war on foreign soil, to the sound of military bands) and the indifference to people's fates and feelings that was typical of the Stalinist regime. Not only did the authorities fail to organize the evacuation of families themselves, but they also actively hindered any personal (or collective) initiative in this matter. Comrade Belchenko, the former head of the NKGB Directorate in Białystok, writes in his memoirs: "At the regional party committee bureau, we reviewed the decisions of some border district party committees to expel from the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) those who had begun sending their families to our rear facilities" (62).

Need we remind you what expulsion from the Party meant for a Red Army commander? And such insane decisions were not made only in Białystok. Let us open General Sandalov's book (who, at the start of the war, was chief of staff of the 4th Army of the Western Front) and read:

"...On June 19, 1941, an expanded plenum of the Brest Regional Party Committee was held... At the plenum, the first secretary of the regional committee, Comrade Tupitsyn, drew attention to the tense international situation and the increased threat of war. He called for heightened vigilance... In response to questions from plenum participants about whether families could be sent from Brest to the east, the regional committee secretary replied that this should not be done so as not to provoke undesirable sentiments..." (79).

However, just a few days later, the party leadership blamed the army command for everything. The secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Latvia, Y. Kalberzin reported to Moscow that "due to the unacceptable and incomprehensible behavior of the headquarters of the Baltic Special Military District, the families of Party and Soviet officials were evacuated at the very last moment, when the 'fifth column' had already emerged and gunfire and machine-gun fire were raging in the streets" (112).

And so it came to pass that on the morning of June 22, 1941, many thousands of Red Army commanders found themselves faced with an inhuman choice: a choice between the duty of a man

obligated to protect his wife and children, and the duty of a military commander responsible for the combat readiness of the unit entrusted to him. God is their judge, but it turned out that, practically everywhere, Red Army commanders abandoned their soldiers and set about saving their wives and children. It is not for us to judge them, but how can one fail to understand people whose families were threatened with almost certain death—if not from a German bomb, then from the bullets of local nationalists?

In those accursed times, in the absence of a general and clear evacuation plan, every commander and every party official acted according to his conscience and his capabilities. Some limited themselves to "going to check on the rear," putting their wife and child on a freight train heading east and returning to their military unit. Others loaded household odds and ends and a potted ficus tree into a truck intended for transporting ammunition. Azarenko, the chairman of the Vitebsk City Council, as noted in the military prosecutor's report, "loaded a barrel of beer into the truck he had prepared so he could get drunk on the road, just as he usually does in the city while on duty..." (68).

"History has given us little time..." They did not have time to organize the evacuation of the families of the command staff. However, despite the chaos and panic—and the notorious "lack of ammunition and fuel"—they managed to carry out what was modestly referred to in NKVD official reports as the "evacuation of prisons."

On July 12, 1941, the head of the NKVD Prison Administration of Ukraine, State Security Captain A.F. Filippov, reported to Moscow: (GARF f. 9413, op. 1, d. 23, pp. 147–153):

"...2,464 people were removed from prisons in the Lviv region under Category 1... All prisoners who were removed under Category 1 were buried in pits dug in the prison basements; in the city of Zlocheve—in a garden... All documents and archives in the prisons were burned, with the exception of prisoner registration logs, card indexes, and records of valuables. All these documents were sent to the city of Kyiv...

During the evacuation, 1,101 people were lost under Category 1 in each of the two prisons in Sambir and Stryi... On June 27, during the evacuation of the Sambir prison, 80 unburied bodies remained...

From the three prisons in the Stanislav region, 1,000 people were lost under Category 1. According to a statement by Hrytsenko, the warden of the Stanislav prison, the burials were carried out outside the prison grounds in a pit dug for this purpose. Some of those in Category 1 were buried on the prison grounds in a pit...

At the Tarnopol prison, 560 people were discharged under Category 1. Burials were carried out in pits dug specifically for this purpose; however, some (197 people) were buried in the NKGB basement, buried very shallowly...

At the Berezhany prison, 174 people were lost under Category 1... Of the total number of those lost under Category 1, 20 people remained in the prison basement; they could not be removed in time because the head of the NKGB district department, Maksimov, categorically refused to provide vehicles for transporting the bodies...

From the Dubno prison, 230 people were removed under Category 1...» (198, 199).

The report also revealed certain shortcomings in the work, though all blame for them was placed on

“collegial agencies,” i.e., the local NKGB authorities (the prison department was part of the NKVD):

“...Local NKGB authorities largely delegated the conduct of Category 1 operations to prison staff, remaining on the sidelines themselves; and since this took place during a retreat under enemy fire, prison staff were not always able to bury the bodies more thoroughly or camouflage the sites...”

The burials were indeed carried out very carelessly. A horrific stench from corpses decomposing in 30-degree heat hung over Lviv. In the area around the prison, it was completely impossible to work without gas masks. Goebbels’ ministry later published an entire book of letters from German soldiers in which they described the mutilated, quartered bodies nailed to the walls that were discovered inside the Lviv prison. For five decades afterward, Soviet propaganda vehemently denied the very fact of the mass murder of prisoners...

In the western regions of Belarus, they did not have time to carry out such a massive massacre—the Wehrmacht was advancing too quickly there. But east of Minsk, the NKVD continued its operations. In a report by the military prosecutor of Vitebsk, we read:

“...On June 24, State Security Sergeant and member of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Priemyshev led 916 convicted prisoners and pretrial detainees out of the Glubek Prison in Vitebsk (consider the number of prisoners in a prison in a backwater county town. — M.S.). Along the way, this Priemyshev shot 55 people in two separate incidents at different times, and in a small town near Ulla, during an enemy air raid, he ordered the convoy—which consisted of 67 people—to shoot the rest, and another 65 people were killed...’ According to his statement, a total of 714 prisoners were shot. We have established through personal files that more than 500 of these prisoners were defendants (i.e., these people’s guilt had not yet been proven even under Soviet law. — M.S.)” (68).

Naturally, Hitler’s propaganda assessed and exploited to the fullest this generous “gift” that the glorious Chekists had bestowed upon the German occupiers. The blood-stained remains were laid out in public squares, and people were herded together to identify the mutilated bodies of their relatives and loved ones. Then the population was “explained” that “Jewish commissars” were to blame for everything, and amid an atmosphere of mass hysteria, the crowd—incited by provocateurs—began a pogrom against the Jews. Thus, by the dug-up graves, one bloody dictatorship passed the “baton” of monstrous crimes to another...

CATASTROPHE

Catastrophe. This word has appeared repeatedly in the pages of our narrative to describe what happened to the Red Army in the summer of 1941. But in the history of World War II, this word has another meaning. Catastrophe or the Holocaust (meaning “total burning” in ancient Greek)—these terms are used to describe the destruction of the majority of Europe’s Jewish population as a result of the genocide organized by Nazi Germany. At least two reasons make the chapter on the Holocaust an essential part of this book. First, it was precisely the defeat and disorderly retreat of the Red Army in the first weeks of the war that doomed nearly 3 million Jews to death—half of all the victims of the Catastrophe. Second, the history of the Holocaust on Soviet soil vividly revealed the characteristic features of the relationship between the people and the authorities, between official propaganda and the actual state of public consciousness and morality—features without which it is impossible to understand the causes of the unprecedented military catastrophe that befell the Soviet Union and its army.

To begin with—a few dry figures and well-known facts.

For several centuries, the majority of the Jewish people lived in the countries of Eastern Europe—Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, and Russia. By the start of World War II, 2.15 million Jews lived in the western regions of the Soviet Union, which were later occupied by German and Romanian troops. Subsequently, each new step in the "active foreign policy of the USSR" brought hundreds of thousands more Jews under Soviet citizenship: 250,000 in Lithuania, 80,000 in Latvia, and 300,000 in Bessarabia. The largest "catch" occurred in September 1939, when vast regions of eastern Poland—home to 1,300,000 Jews—were incorporated into Soviet Ukraine and Belarus. Thus, by June 22, 1941, more than 4 million Jews were concentrated in the territory that was soon to be occupied. In addition, there were approximately 200,000–250,000 Jewish refugees from the western regions of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania in the border areas (159).

Later, after the war, communist historians employed a simple arithmetic trick and stopped counting natives of Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania as Soviet citizens. In this way, they managed to more than halve the number of Holocaust victims on Soviet soil by "reclassifying" the dead as victims of genocide in Poland, Romania, and so on. This shameful sleight of hand not only contradicts all legal norms (at the time of the occupation, the future victims were subjects of the USSR), but also completely contradicts the long-standing claims of Soviet propaganda that the "liberation campaigns" were aimed precisely at "protecting the populations of Poland and the Baltic states from the horrors of Nazi occupation."

Judging by the course of events in the summer of 1941, the idea that the state bears any responsibility for the lives of its subjects was completely alien to the leaders of the time—as well as to later propagandists. To this day, not a single document or piece of evidence has been found to suggest that the Soviet government even sought ways to save those of its citizens who, under the conditions of occupation, faced not merely a hard, joyless, and hungry LIFE, but a cruel and inevitable DEATH.

High Command Directive No. 45 of July 2, 1941, "On the Procedure for the Evacuation of the Population and Material Assets," contains numerous clauses and subclauses. Clause 9 stipulates: "Do not evacuate sick horses; destroy them on the spot." Furthermore, following the section on sick horses, paragraph 13 states: "The families of military personnel and senior civilian officials are to be evacuated by rail" (5, p. 43). And not a single word is said about what to do with the families (typically large ones) of Jews.

Of course, it was technically impossible to evacuate two million people in a matter of days (the Red Army had retreated from Lithuania, most of Belarus, and the western regions of Ukraine within the first 7–10 days of the war). Acknowledging this indisputable fact should not diminish the significance of the fact that the authorities made not even the slightest attempt to evacuate anyone—not even a few thousand children. Moreover, during the first days—the most critical for the fate of the Jewish population in the border regions—border posts continued to operate along the "old border" (i.e., the 1939 Soviet-Polish border), detaining anyone who did not have a special exit permit or a Party membership card! (159, p. 268).

This absurd practice of evacuating the population solely on the basis of "exit permits" continued until the wave of the German offensive swept away the border posts on the "old border" themselves. It is difficult to explain all this with sound logic. People are the most valuable "resource," and there is no reason to leave them to the enemy. Incidentally, during the "second retreat" (in the summer of 1942), evacuation was viewed as a patriotic duty of every Soviet citizen. Most likely, at the start of the war,

the age-old bureaucratic instinct simply kicked in: “grab them and don’t let them go.” Any independent action—especially one as significant as changing one’s place of residence—without special authorization from the authorities was seen as a violation of all norms and principles.

If it was difficult to save even a portion of the Jewish population—and practically impossible to evacuate them all—it was quite simple to warn people of the mortal danger threatening them. It was much easier and cheaper than culling sick horses. The black “dish” of a loudspeaker hung on every village street, not to mention the cities. Newspapers and leaflets were published and distributed in the tens of millions. If there was one thing the Soviet authorities knew how to do, it was to guide the population “onto the true path,” and the necessary infrastructure for this had been established long before the war. But nothing was done. Absolutely nothing. Even in cases where the mass extermination of Jews was clearly described, newspaper articles used either general phrasing (“the Nazis herded several thousand peaceful Soviet citizens toward an anti-tank trench…”) or ideologically convenient clichés: “vanguard workers,” “Komsomol members,” “parents and wives of Red Army soldiers.”

The first large-scale information campaign took place only on August 24, 1941. On that day, All-Union Radio broadcast a “radio rally of the Jewish community.” Reports on the rally were also published in all the major newspapers. The main objective of the event was to mobilize Jewish communities in England and the United States, which was intended to pressure the ruling circles in those countries to provide more effective aid to the USSR. However, regardless of the organizers’ intentions, this radio broadcast helped inform Jews in the Soviet Union about the threat looming over them. Unfortunately, the information came far too late. By that time, the Baltic states, Belarus, Moldova, most of Left-Bank Ukraine, and the western regions of the Smolensk Oblast had already been occupied.

As for official statements by the country’s leadership, the first mention of the brutal massacres of the Jewish population appeared in a note from the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR dated January 6, 1942. In this document, an entire paragraph was devoted to the tragedy of Babi Yar and the deaths of 52,000 Jews in Kyiv. Finally, on December 19, 1942, a special statement by the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs was published, titled “The Implementation by the Nazi Authorities of Plans to Exterminate the Jewish Population of Europe.” However, by the time this Statement was released, there was no one left to inform. In December 1942, the last 250,000 prisoners were living out their final days in ghettos and concentration camps in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union (159). It is noteworthy that the Statement, which effectively summed up the implementation of the “plans of the Nazi authorities,” did not in any way call on local residents or partisan commanders to rescue those who could still be saved...

Thus, word of mouth became the only means of communication, and the refugees’ main mode of transportation was their own two feet. There were no longer any horses (“the indisputable successes of Stalin’s collectivization”), and private vehicles had not yet been introduced. Nevertheless, about 1 million (according to other sources, up to 1.5 million) Jews managed to outrun the advancing German army.

Those who escaped were mainly residents of the RSFSR and the eastern regions of Ukraine—they had more time, and many were evacuated in an organized manner as workers from industrial enterprises being evacuated. About 3 million people remained in the occupied territory, including: 220,000 in Lithuania, 620,000 in Western Belarus and 180,000 in Eastern Belarus, 250,000 in Moldova, and 1,500,000 in Ukraine (159).

Four SS “Einsatzgruppen,” totaling about 3,000 men, were sent to the territory of the USSR to

exterminate the Jews. Among them were at least 600 technical personnel: drivers, mechanics, radio operators, and translators. In order for such forces to locate, identify, and exterminate 3 million Jews (who were doing everything they could to hide, forge documents, and take refuge in forests and swamps), the Nazis would likely have needed precisely the thousand years that the Third Reich had hoped to last. In other words, both the pace and the very possibility of carrying out the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" depended to a great extent on the attitude of the local population toward this matter.

The history of the Holocaust provides examples of a wide variety of scenarios. For instance, Finland, Spain, and Bulgaria—countries considered allies of Nazi Germany—completely refused to participate in the implementation of Hitler's plans for genocide. In Italy and Hungary, the mass extermination of Jews began only after the German army occupied those countries (in 1943–1944, respectively). The authorities and people of Denmark saved virtually the entire Jewish community in their country by smuggling 8,000 people by sea to neutral Sweden.

In defeated France, there were 350,000 Jews living there on the eve of the war. About 100,000 people were hidden by local residents and Catholic monasteries, while another 40,000–50,000 Jews were secretly smuggled to Spain and Switzerland. Eighty-three thousand people perished—less than a quarter of France's prewar Jewish population. One-third of the Jewish communities in the Czech lands and Serbia managed to survive the occupation. One in four Jews in Belgium and the Netherlands survived—a most remarkable fact, given the size of these countries, their population density, the lack of large forested areas, and the full four years of German occupation.

In the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, the "proportion of extermination" consistently exceeded 90%. The Holocaust in the Baltic states was unprecedented in its pace, brutality, and the degree of involvement of the local population—up to 96% of the Jews remaining under occupation were exterminated there. In total, 2,825,000 Soviet Jews perished at the hands of the occupiers and their local collaborators (159, pp. 43, 96, 167, 206).

The majority of survivors were not those rescued by local residents, but rather prisoners of the ghettos in the Romanian-occupied zone (so-called Transnistria, i.e., the territory of Ukraine between the Dniester and the Southern Bug). At the start of the war, the extermination of Jews by Romanian troops and gendarmerie was massive and extremely brutal (for example, on October 23, 1941, 19,000 people were burned alive in artillery depots in Odessa). However, after the defeat of the Nazi forces at Stalingrad, the Romanian leadership halted the mass killings and subsequently even permitted the delivery of food aid from international organizations to the ghettos.

As for the German-occupied zone, virtually all Jews who had not managed to evacuate perished there.

Even if we had no other documents or memoirs at our disposal, the sheer "efficiency" and totality of the genocide carried out on Soviet soil alone irrefutably prove that the SS executioners found the necessary number of collaborators among the local population here. Unfortunately, there are documents, facts, and miraculously surviving witnesses to such atrocities that simply defy human comprehension. It was precisely the executioners and fanatics from among former Soviet citizens who brought to the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" a passion that the servants of the soulless machinery of Hitler's state lacked.

On July 4, 1941, Latvian nationalists in Riga herded 500 people into a synagogue and burned them alive; in Kaunas, 4,000 Jews were beaten to death with sledgehammers or drowned; and on July 10, in

the western Belarusian town of Jedwabne (now part of Poland), local residents burned 1,600 Jews alive after days of torture and abuse. Often, local "activists" were eager to take on such "work," which the Germans themselves had refused to do in the early stages of the war. For example, the first mass execution of young Jewish children in Ukraine was carried out on August 19 near Bila Tserkva by local police forces. On September 6, 1941, an SS Sonderkommando, having exterminated 1,100 adult Jews in Radomyshl, ordered the Ukrainian police to kill 561 children. The sadistic "enthusiasm" was so great and contagious that on September 24, Field Marshal Rundstedt, commander of Army Group South, issued an order prohibiting Wehrmacht personnel from "participating in the excesses of the local population…."

But it is not even these horrific events that should be considered the main differences in the implementation of the Holocaust on Soviet soil and in Western Europe. It is fundamentally important to note that in the West, the genocide of the Jews was concealed, while in the East, it was persistently flaunted. Why?

The construction and operation of any factory—including a "death factory"—requires money. The towering chimneys of the crematoria had to be built, the ovens supplied with fuel, and the gas chambers with expensive chemicals. Transporting hundreds of thousands of Jews from various parts of occupied Europe to Auschwitz and Majdanek diverted locomotives, railcars, and coal supplies away from the needs of the front. For example, in the summer of 1944, the Germans transported 445,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. This placed an enormous additional burden on the railways, and Germany undertook it despite the fact that the military situation that summer was only slightly better for the Wehrmacht than it had been for the Red Army in the summer of 1941! Only the Jews of the Soviet Union (with a few rare exceptions) were not transported far away; they were exterminated right where they lived, openly, in full view of the population, and with the participation of anyone who wished to take part.

One possible explanation for this paradox, which seems strange at first glance, is that the Nazis were never able to come up with an explanation for the necessity of the genocide of the Jews that would satisfy public opinion in Western Europe. The claim that Jews were "racially inferior subhumans" could only frighten and alarm a Frenchman or a Hungarian ("Won't they declare us next?").

As for the old resentment over the claim that "the Jews crucified Christ," it no longer held sway in the civilized Europe of the 20th century.

As a result, in order to avoid stirring up sentiments among the population of Western Europe that were undesirable to them, the Nazis incurred enormous transportation costs—extremely burdensome given the conditions of a major war.

On the Eastern Front, everything was completely different. "Beat the Jew-political officer—his face is begging for a brick." The text of this famous leaflet, which rained down in vast quantities from the sky onto columns of retreating Soviet troops, expressed the very essence of the matter in a simple, accessible, and memorable way. Not just a "Jew" and not just a "political officer," but specifically a "Jewish political officer." That little hyphen (contrary to all rules of arithmetic) became a sign not of subtraction, nor even of addition, but of the multiplication of hatred. Comrade Ponomarenko, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist Party, reported to Stalin as early as the fourth day of the war: "All of their (the Germans'—M.S.) propaganda, both oral and written, is carried out under the banner of the struggle against Jews and communists, which are treated as synonyms" (112).

The entire mighty propaganda apparatus of the Third Reich was directed precisely at proving the equivalence of the concepts “Jew and commissar,” “Jews and Soviet power,” and “Jews and the NKVD.” In millions of leaflets and thousands of newspaper articles (and in the occupied territories, numerous newspapers were published in Russian, Ukrainian, and other languages), and in countless public speeches, the idea was propagated that it was the Jews who were the main driving force behind the communist regime, that it was they who unleashed the “Red Terror,” and that it was the Jews, and the Jews alone, who participated in establishing the “Soviet new order” in the annexed territories of Eastern Poland and the Baltic states.

As a side note, let us observe that, not to mention the absolute legal and moral unacceptability of the thesis of “collective criminal responsibility” of an entire people for crimes committed by individuals, the very assertion of “Jewish dominance” in the organs of Soviet power and the NKVD by the late 1930s did not correspond to the actual facts. Yes, it is true that during the years of the revolution and the Civil War (1917–1921), the proportion of Jews in the leadership of left-wing extremist organizations (Bolsheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, anarchists) was disproportionately high. The “cadres” who survived the crucible of the Civil War subsequently moved into leadership positions in the party and Soviet apparatus, as well as in the Cheka and GPU. After the Great Terror of 1937–1938, the situation changed radically.

In 1934, Jews accounted for 37% of the NKVD’s top leadership (the central apparatus of the People’s Commissariat and the heads of regional and republican directorates) (140, p. 495). Of the 37 NKVD leaders who received the highest personal ranks of “Commissar of State Security” in 1935—of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd ranks, respectively—20 were Jewish (54%). But by 1941, only two of these 37 “Chekist generals” were still alive! (196, pp. 19, 395). Of the 74 new personnel who joined the NKVD’s central apparatus in the spring and summer of 1938 (i.e., while Yezhov was still in power), 73% (54 people) were already of Slavic nationalities (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians). Subsequently, the majority of “Yezhov’s appointees” (85%) were physically eliminated after the arrival in late fall 1938 of the new NKVD leadership headed by L. Beria (196, pp. 348, 400). As of July 1, 1939, the proportion of Jews in the NKVD’s top leadership had fallen to 4% (140, p. 495). New, very young (30–35 years old) personnel took over the leadership of the punitive system, 80% of whom were of Slavic nationalities.

Nor is there any question of an “excess” of Jews in the administrative apparatus of the “liberated” territories.

For example, in the Bialystok Region (Western Belarus), by mid-1940, 11,598 people had been appointed to senior and junior positions in the Soviet and Party apparatus, including 5,195 Poles, 3,214 Belarusians, 2,431 Jews, and 613 Russians (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 22, d. 230, l. 69). In the Drohobych region (Western Ukraine), 3,885 Ukrainians, 1,920 Russians, 336 Jews, and 245 Poles were appointed to administrative positions (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 22, d. 3108, l. 38) (197). Thus, in Białystok, the proportion of Jews in administrative bodies was somewhat lower, and in Drohobych—significantly lower than their share of the total population (in the cities and towns of Eastern Poland, Jews made up 25–35% of the population). Yet Jews were arrested far more “willingly” than they were appointed to “lucrative positions,” — as noted above, from September 1939 to February 1941, 23,000 Jews, 21,000 Ukrainians, and 7,500 Belarusians were arrested in the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus.

Of course, Nazi propaganda did not rely on figures and facts, but rather on deep-rooted, irrational anti-Semitic prejudices, combined with a wave of intense hatred toward the communist government and its repressive apparatus. The public humiliation and subsequent brutal extermination of Jews was intended, according to the plan of Hitler’s occupiers, to incite hatred toward everything associated with

Soviet rule and to draw the population of the occupied territories into active collaboration with the Nazis. And while the party leadership, having fled in their comfortable cars, was far away and out of reach, the defenseless Jewish families with many children were right there, and they became the targets upon whom the accumulated anger and despair could be vented.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of genocide victims had nothing to do with the NKVD's punitive system—and, in fact, bore no outward resemblance to the "fat cats in power"—did not bother the Nazis, their accomplices, or (most importantly and tragically) ordinary citizens. Soviet society had long been thoroughly psychologically conditioned to phenomena such as mass extrajudicial terror, punishment without crime, and the collective punishment of entire population groups for the (often fabricated) crimes of individuals. Did the so-called "kulaks" really resemble "exploiters" lounging on their stoves? And how many of the so-called "Trotskyists" had ever seen Trotsky in person or even read any of his books? And the classification of entire peoples as "suspicious elements"—manifested in the arrests and deportations of Koreans, Chinese, Poles, Latvians, and Finns—was by no means a novelty for Soviet citizens.

To be fair—amidst the bloody madness, there were people capable of the highest heroism, courage, and self-sacrifice. Despite the occupiers' brutal terror (execution—including the execution of entire families—was imposed not only for harboring Jews but also for failing to report them!), thousands of people of all nationalities came to the aid of those doomed to perish. The Israeli memorial and research center "Yad Vashem" has identified more than 18,000 people who rescued Jews during the genocide.

Among them were 5,500 Poles, 1,609 Ukrainians, 488 Lithuanians, and 440 Belarusians (it should be noted that in this context, the terms "Pole" and "Ukrainian" refer more to the location of the events than to the specific nationality of the rescuers).

In the Belarusian town of Breslav, 60 families—ordinary peasants, doctors, and Orthodox and Catholic priests—were involved in rescuing Jews. In the Hero City of Brest, only 19 of the 25,000 Jews survived. Six of them were saved by Polina Makarenko's family, who hid them in their small house. Alexander Dyatlov, a resident of Uman and a veteran and disabled veteran of World War I, hid 12 Jews in his home. One of the neighbors informed the Germans. The entire Dyatlov family, including three children, was shot. Caregivers at Minsk's orphanages hid more than 500 Jewish children from the persecutors throughout the three years of occupation. The director of Orphanage No. 2 in Kyiv saved 12 children. Wehrmacht Captain Willy Schulz transported 26 people out of the Minsk ghetto in a truck. The mayor of Kremenchug, Sinitsa-Verkhovsky, was shot in November 1941 for issuing forged identity cards to Jews. Peasants in the village of Rakovets (Western Ukraine) hid 33 Jewish families. In the village of Kuyalnik (Odessa Oblast), collective farm worker V.M. Ivanov saved 25 people... (159).

Strictly speaking, the executioners and their active accomplices accounted for no more than 2–3% of the total adult population in the occupied regions of the USSR. Nor should we forget that ordinary people were deprived of the opportunity to express even moral condemnation—the perpetrators were armed and backed by the entire military machine of Nazi Germany. However, it would be an inappropriate and false oversimplification of the actual situation to claim that the majority of the population remained neutral. And the point is not only that the lack of simple human compassion (not to mention the mockery and ridicule from former neighbors, coworkers, and students) literally stunned the Jews, robbing many of them of the will to live and resist, A significant portion of the population, though not directly participating in the killings, rushed to occupy the "vacated living space" and willingly profited from the looting of Jewish property and from the predatory "trade" in which family heirlooms were exchanged for a piece of bread. A new profession even emerged—the so-called

“shmaltsovniki.” This was the nickname given to those who hunted down Jews; upon discovering those in hiding, they extorted a ransom from them in exchange for not reporting them. Then, after taking everything they could from their victims (“rendering the lard”), they turned the Jews over to the occupying authorities (159, p. 295).

A vivid illustration of all that has been said can be found in the following excerpt from a lengthy report by K.Y. Met-te—one of the leaders of the Communist underground in the city of Mogilev:

“...In the first months of the occupation, the Germans physically exterminated all the Jews. This fact gave rise to many different reflections (note—not hatred for the executioners, not compassion for the victims, but ‘different reflections.’—M.S.). The most reactionary segment of the population, which was relatively small, fully justified this atrocity and aided the Germans in carrying it out. The majority of ordinary people did not agree with such brutal repression, but claimed that the Jews themselves were to blame for being hated by everyone; however, it would have been sufficient to restrict them economically and politically...

...The rest of the population, who were pro-Soviet, sympathized with and helped the Jews in many ways, but were deeply outraged by the Jews’ passivity, since they were allowing themselves to be slaughtered without making a single—even spontaneous—attempt to resist the Germans in the city or to flee en masse to join the partisans... Pro-Soviet-minded people noted that before the war, a great many Jews had tried to secure better-paying and more prestigious jobs and had established a system of mutual support among themselves... “And now the Jews, too, are expecting help from the Russian Ivans, while they themselves do nothing,” they said...

...Given the mood of the population, it was impossible to openly and directly defend the Jews in our propaganda work, since this could undoubtedly provoke a negative reaction (emphasis mine—M.S.) to our leaflets even from our own people—those with pro-Soviet leanings or those close to us...” (158).

The text is shocking. Judging by it, the residents of Mogilev perceive what is happening as a war between Jews and Germans. A minority actively sides with the Germans, while the vast majority of ordinary people quietly gloat (“the Jews have only themselves to blame”). The “better” people are deeply outraged by the “passivity of the Jews,” yet they themselves remain in the city and have no intention whatsoever of joining the partisans en masse. The mere thought that “Russian Ivan” might have to get involved in this fight—which is foreign to him (!!!)—causes extreme irritation among these wonderful “Soviet-minded” people. It is worth noting that the occupation posters hung in Mogilev in the spring of 1943 promised five packs of makhorka for every Jew turned in (159). Cheap—even by the standards of those hungry wartime years. But apparently, the city’s residents didn’t even try to “find more lucrative opportunities”; many were quite content with the tobacco...

THE BARREL AND THE HOOP

For many years, any discussion of the similarities between the Stalinist and Nazi regimes was an absolutely forbidden topic. Even in the few color films “about the war,” one could not see the Nazi flag in its actual—that is, red—color. Then, starting in the late 1980s, historians and journalists suddenly burst forth: they recalled and listed everything, right down to a common song that in one country was sung to the lyrics “higher and higher and higher,” and in the other—“Mein Führer, Mein Führer, Mein Führer…”

Now is the time to recall and discuss the two most important differences in the structure of these

totalitarian despotisms.

Hitler came to power on the wave of a nationalist upsurge (which he himself had organized). “Germany above all”—that was the main slogan, which, in Hitler’s rise to power, played the same role that Lenin’s brilliant maxim “plunder the plundered” played in our country. The Nazis categorically forbade plundering their own, their fellow Germans. They sought to unite their own German nation, whereas the Bolsheviks were concerned solely with pitting workers against employers, soldiers against officers, farmhands against peasants, leftists against rightists, and rightists against leftists...

The Germans did not have to endure either “dekulakization” or the denunciation of millions of “saboteurs.” All the mass hatred necessary for the functioning of a totalitarian dictatorship was directed not inward but outward—toward Germany’s external enemies. And the result exceeded all expectations. Right up until the very last days of the war, the German soldier was ready to shed blood to save the Vaterland from the “Asian hordes of Bolsheviks” and the “mercenaries of the Jewish plutocracy of the West.”

Against this backdrop, the ideology and practice of Bolshevism appear to be sheer idiocy. Recognizing the inevitability (and indeed, the desirability) of ever-new world and European wars, Lenin and his henchmen declared patriotism to be a dangerous and harmful relic of petty-bourgeois consciousness. During World War I (which official Russian propaganda at the time called the “Second Patriotic War”), they called for “planting bayonets in the ground” and making peace with enemy soldiers. After seizing power, the Bolsheviks even banished any trace of national identity from the very name of their army. The army was neither “Russian” nor “Russian” (in the modern sense), nor even “Soviet” (after the name of the state). The army was called the “Workers’ and Peasants’ Army,” soldiers became “Red Army soldiers,” and all enemies were labeled “Whites”: White Poles, White Chinese, White Finns...

Lenin is still somewhat understandable. Having spent the best years of his life in émigré cafés in Paris and Zurich, among a narrow circle of fanatical sectarians, he became detached from the realities of Russian life and genuinely believed that the Russian peasant would go to war for the “triumph of the World Revolution.” But Comrade Stalin—an unprincipled pragmatist and cold realist—how could he have gone down that path? Yes, of course, Stalin later came to his senses, disbanded the Comintern, dusted off the glowing images of “tsarist generals” from the archives, and Alexander Nevsky took the place in propaganda of Lev Trotsky, the founder of the Red Army... But all that would come later. And in war, being late is deadly dangerous.

Even more significant for the subject of our study is another difference between the Bolshevik and fascist dictatorships.

By the time the Soviet-German war began, Hitler had fulfilled most of his promises. Stalin and the Bolsheviks had deceived the simple-minded people who had trusted them in almost every respect.

Hitler united all Germans under a single state, gave every worker a job and a decent wage, created an impressive system of social support for mothers and children, expanded the territory of the Reich many times over, led the German army through the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and did not wrong any of those members of Germany’s old elite who agreed to work with the new government. Hitler was not afraid to show German workers the reality of life in Stalin’s “state of workers and peasants.” In a radio address to the nation on October 3, 1941, he declared: “Our soldiers have arrived in lands that had been under Bolshevik rule for 25 years. Those soldiers in whose hearts or minds communist ideas still lingered will return home, in the literal sense of the word, healed... They walked the streets of this ‘paradise.’

This is nothing more than a factory for producing weapons against Europe, built at the expense of the citizens' standard of living..."

The Bolsheviks fulfilled only one of their many promises: they promised to wipe out all the "lords" root and branch—and they did. And they went way overboard. In every other respect, it was a complete deception.

They did not share with anyone what they had expropriated from the expropriators—in other words, what they had plundered. Despite the astronomical sums seized from the tsarist family, the aristocracy, the church, and private capital, the real standard of living for the majority of the population of the world's richest country remained just as destitute as it had been before the revolution.

Instead of the promised equality, a new aristocracy emerged, which—in a country of beggars and cannibals—flew in airplanes, rode in lacquered "Packards," lived in the estates of grand dukes, vacationed on imperial beaches—in short, enjoyed life according to the standards of American millionaires.

Promises to move workers' families from barracks into palaces ended with the few surviving palaces being turned into overcrowded, filthy communal dormitories.

Promises to "give the factories to the workers" resulted in former contract workers being turned into serfs, deprived even of the right to quit the factory where they worked three shifts for a pittance, yet faced a full prison sentence for being half an hour late.

The landowners' lands, seized by the peasants in 1917, were taken away from them. Along with all the property they had acquired through hard work and sweat, along with their freedom, and for many—along with their very lives. The poverty in which a collective farmer from Smolensk or Novgorod languished shocked the German soldiers, who simply could not believe that people in Europe could live that way.

With very few exceptions, all the military officers, engineers, economists, and diplomats of old Russia who voluntarily entered the service of the Bolsheviks did not survive until June 1941—they were shot or "wiped out in the camps."

So what kind of propaganda could have made up for such a deception, such a collapse of the hopes and expectations of millions of people?

That is why Comrade Stalin, in his thirty years in power, never once visited a single collective farm, never set foot in a single factory workshop, and never danced in circles with the children. He did not seek the love of the masses, nor did he likely believe in its existence. He needed only one thing: submission—absolute and unquestioning submission—and he achieved it by the one method he knew and could employ: terror. Massive and monstrously cruel terror. He was convinced that universal fear was the very foundation upon which his unshakable power would rest, and that "the gates of hell would not prevail against it…."

That was the greatest mistake of his life.

Needless to say, the fear of punishment is a powerful tool for influencing human behavior. It is

pointless to deny this. But even more absurd were Comrade Stalin's hopes that a people crushed by terror could be rallied for the Great Patriotic War. Having ruled Russia unchallenged and unchecked for many years, Stalin never understood the meaning of the wise Russian proverb: "Fight fire with fire." The devastating blow dealt by the Wehrmacht replaced the old fear with a new one, and the Chekist's revolver faded into insignificance amid the roar of thousands of guns and the clanking of the tracks of thousands of tanks. And then Stalin's empire, held together by terror and ruled by terror, began to crumble rapidly and irrepressibly.

Like a barrel whose hoops had been knocked off.

WHEN DID THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR BEGIN?

Salvation came from a place Stalin could never have expected. This miraculous escape from certain doom so shook the leader of the people that he could not contain himself and declared it for all to hear. True, he quickly came to his senses afterward and never spoke of SUCH things aloud again. But in November 1941, while delivering a speech at a solemn gathering marking the latest anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin suddenly spoke the truth: "Hitler's foolish policy has turned the peoples of the USSR into sworn enemies of present-day Germany" (172). These words succinctly and accurately articulate the main reason why the struggle between two bloody dictatorships over the division of their plunder ultimately turned into the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people.

Hitler committed a long series of egregious blunders at a time when victory over Stalin's empire was literally falling into his lap. The foremost mistake was the very strategic focus on the purely military defeat of the enemy. One hundred and fifty German divisions could not occupy a country stretching from Brest to Vladivostok and from Murmansk to Ashgabat. If the Soviet Union could have been destroyed at all, it would have been only by an explosion from within (which is exactly what happened half a century later), and the sole purpose of the military operation could have been nothing other than to trigger such an explosion. But Hitler, that narcissistic fanatic who fancied himself an instrument of "providence," was unable (or unwilling) to grasp such obvious truths. And yet, regardless of the original plans of Hitler's leadership, the process of internal decay within the Soviet state proceeded at an ever-increasing pace.

In the national peripheries of the USSR (the Baltic states, Western Ukraine, and later the North Caucasus and the Kuban), a full-scale armed uprising began, leading to the emergence of governments of self-proclaimed "states" in Lviv, Riga, and Kaunas. Most of the population in the country's central regions greeted the Germans—albeit without flowers—with mixed feelings of distrust and anticipation. By early fall, the Germans had taken one and a half million former Red Army soldiers prisoner; during September and October 1941, that number more than doubled. In effect, this was a massive "conscription contingent," complete with commanding officers, military specialists of all kinds, and colossal stockpiles of ammunition and weapons—ranging from rifles to KV tanks—which, after all, did not vanish without a trace but remained in vast quantities in the territory controlled by the Wehrmacht.

Wehrmacht generals, who had observed the situation in the Red Army and in prisoner-of-war camps at close range, repeatedly appealed to Hitler to exploit this unique situation in order to bring the USSR out of the war as quickly as possible. The possibility of repeating the experience of 1917–1918 seemed entirely realistic: at that time, Germany, having supported the change of power in Russia, concluded a separate peace treaty—the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk—with the new government, thereby securing a free hand to launch an offensive on the Western Front. Taras Bulba's maxim ("I brought you into the world, and I will kill you") could very well have been applied by the Germans to the Bolshevik regime in

Russia.

On the ruins of the Soviet Union, several “independent states” allied with Hitler’s Germany (such as Slovakia or Croatia) could have been created, which would have supplied the Wehrmacht with food, raw materials for the war industry, and auxiliary military units. However, Hitler—whose deranged mind was a bizarre mix of racist delusions about the “inferiority of the Slavs” and fear of the Eastern giant—replied that he had no need for an alliance with Slavic “subhumans,” and that the Wehrmacht was simply required to quickly crush the Red Army. Then he stopped responding altogether. When Field Marshal von Bock, commander of Army Group Center, sent a proposal to Berlin to create a “liberation army” of 200,000 volunteers and to form a Russian government in Smolensk, his report was returned in November 1941 with a resolution from Keitel: “Such ideas cannot be discussed with the Führer.”

For the most biased and inattentive readers, let me clarify: what is set forth above is not a story about “how good things could have been.” These are somber reflections on the fact that everything could have been even worse than it actually was—though, one might ask, how much worse could it have been? In the heat of World War II, there was no middle ground, and Stalin’s defeat would have meant nothing less than a colossal strengthening of Hitler’s position, placing in his hands the vast raw material resources of the world’s richest country, not to mention millions of obedient workers accustomed to any conditions. The regime that might have been established in the territory “liberated” from the authority of the NKVD and the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) would most likely have differed from Stalin’s only in the color of the banners and the inscriptions on the doors of the officials’ offices. However, it is not out of the question that the surnames of the occupants of many of those offices might have remained the same...

Fortunately for humanity, Hitler missed the unique opportunity afforded to him by the Bolsheviks’ long-standing rule in Russia. He did not even attempt to “sugarcoat the pill” and present his aggression against the USSR as a “liberation campaign.” Red Army prisoners of war, whom the Soviet state had abandoned, were herded like cattle into vast, barbed-wire-enclosed clearings and left there to die of starvation and dysentery. Better than all the GlavPUR propagandists combined, the fascist leaders demonstrated and proved to the Red Army soldiers that even captivity was no salvation from death. The release of Red Army prisoners of various nationalities, which had been initiated by the army command, was halted on November 13, 1941. Then came an early and bitter winter, during which two-thirds of the prisoners taken in 1941 perished from cold, hunger, and disease.

With the same categorical clarity, the occupation administration demonstrated to the stunned population that it was time to forget the notion that “the Germans are a cultured nation” and to get used to the “new order,” which turned out to be even simpler than the old one—summary execution on the spot for any offense. With brazen candor, they explained to the people that serving members of the “master race” would henceforth be the sole purpose in life for those permitted to live. Not everyone was permitted to live. The horrific scenes of the genocide of the Jews, the mass deaths of prisoners of war, the shootings of hostages, and public executions—all of this shook the population of the occupied territories. And even those who, in the summer of 1941, had greeted the German invasion with hopes for change for the better were horrified and began to realize that life under such a “new order” was unbearable.

Yes, of course, the leaflets—dropped by the millions from German planes—promised Red Army soldiers good rations in captivity and a return home after the war ended. But the “wireless telephone” of word of mouth was working—and working with astonishing effectiveness. And so, with each

passing day and month, millions upon millions of Soviet people began to realize that the war in which they were forced to fight and die was no longer being waged for the liberation of yet another group of "class brothers" in Zanzibar, nor for the ultimate triumph of "the eternally living teachings of Karl Marx," but simply so that they, their families, and their children could live and hope for a better future.

That was when the Great Patriotic War began.

Let's not oversimplify things. The life of a human community numbering in the millions is infinitely more complex than any schematic model.

The formula proposed above ("an empire held together by terror and ruled by terror"), while reflecting the dominant feature of the Stalinist state, is an extreme journalistic simplification of reality. The poetic phrase "as one man, the entire Soviet people" is suitable only for a song. Soviet society was extremely heterogeneous. It was impossible to achieve the goal of forced industrial modernization solely by digging canals (and, moreover, by stealing Western technology). The era of modernization gave rise to a "army" of many millions of energetic, ambitious young people—the children of janitors and watchmen—for whom the revolution had opened the path to the top of the social ladder. For them—young engineers and Stakhanovites, pilots and poets—the Soviet government was "our own Soviet government."

It was an extraordinary generation that, in the span of 10 to 15 years, made the journey from the village hut with a rotten thatched roof where their parents lived to the lecture hall of a university in the capital; from the student bench to the office of the director of a massive factory. High social mobility and the intoxicating feeling that "the time of fairy tales has come true" are, perhaps, a more powerful "social hallucinogen" than material comfort per se. Stalin understood this; he skillfully supported the "storm and stress" of Soviet youth and artfully used ambitious "rising stars" to ensure a continuous rotation of personnel at the upper echelons of the administrative hierarchy. The full might of the totalitarian state's propaganda machine was directed toward shaping in the minds of Soviet youth a vision of a tangible and imminent radiant future, toward which "all paths are open in our country." This extremely active, though relatively small, social stratum became the "reserve of the High Command" that, at a critical moment, helped save Stalin's state from complete collapse.

Finally, the author by no means suggests reducing the entire history of the war to sociology, much less to a description of psychological effects and emotions. "But do you know what makes us strong, Basmanov? / Not the army—no, not Polish aid—/ But by public opinion; yes! by the people's opinion," says one of the characters in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. It's beautifully put, but we mustn't forget that an army is sustained not only by "public opinion," but also by orders and discipline. The role of a military commander is enormous, and wherever commanders and commissars were able to maintain order and control, and protect their soldiers from being swept up in the general panic—there the enemy was dealt a decisive blow already in the very first battles. Such divisions, regiments, battalions, and batteries could be found on every section of the front. Tens of thousands of Red Army soldiers and commanders began their Great Patriotic War at dawn on June 22, 1941. Caught up in the chaos of a general rout, without neighbors, without communication—and without hope of survival—these stubbornly unyielding batteries and battalions forced the Germans time and again to shift from marching order to battle formation, slowed the pace of their advance, and shattered the enemy's arrogance.

"Even in death, a hero is honored." The nameless heroes of the war's early days were denied even this modest consolation. They were destined to perish in obscurity, never knowing whether they had

succeeded, at the cost of their own lives, in bringing the common Victory one step closer. Most of them received neither medals nor glory, nor even a gravestone. But it was precisely they who saved the country through their self-sacrificing feat. They bought the precious time needed for a profound shift in the people's attitude toward the war to take place. Let us not forget the enormous scale of the Red Army's logistical and technical preparations, nor the quantity and quality of Soviet weaponry. Even a platoon (three vehicles) of KV tanks could mow down and crush a Wehrmacht mechanized column; even a single pillbox garrison, sheltered by indestructible concrete walls, could litter the entire bank of a border river with the corpses of German soldiers...

Finally, the natural and geographical factor cannot be overlooked. It should not be treated as an absolute, but it is also absurd to deny the fact that Russia's vast expanses alone absorbed and dissipated the invading army. It was easy for Napoleon. His army, stretched out in a single line, marched in column toward Moscow. The Wehrmacht launched its offensive on a front stretching from Kaunas to Przemyśl (about 700 km as the crow flies), and by the end of the year, fighting was already taking place on a front stretching from Tikhvin to Rostov-on-Don (1,600 km as the crow flies). The German army's supply lines were constantly stretching. Every shell and every liter of gasoline had to travel a gigantic distance of one and a half to two thousand kilometers before reaching the front. These supply lines had to be guarded and protected by air defense and garrisons. And with the onset of autumn, the dirt roads of central Russia turned into a vast sea of mud that was impassable for Wehrmacht vehicles.

Having missed a very real opportunity to eliminate the Eastern Front through political means, Hitler failed to make full use of all available military potential to achieve victory on the battlefield. Dozens of Wehrmacht divisions, hundreds of thousands of servicemen, and millions of reservists deep in the rear were preparing for "post-Barbarossa operations" at a time when the troops on the Eastern Front were being whittled down in fierce battles. Even the relatively moderate losses suffered by German troops in the summer of 1941 were not fully replenished with new equipment and personnel. The Germans did not reach Moscow. Bleeding dry from months of fighting, the Wehrmacht divisions, on their last legs, crawled their way to the city. There, in the snow-white fields outside Moscow, the freezing remnants of the Eastern Army were crushed by dozens of fresh Red Army divisions, transferred from Siberia and the Far East.

Our narrative has come to a close. All that remains is to answer the question posed in the title of the final chapter. Of course, there can be no question of establishing any precise date for the "Great Turning Point."

There are no such "switches" capable of bringing about a profound shift in the consciousness of a vast, multinational people in an instant. Nevertheless, it is both possible and necessary to identify certain, entirely rational criteria and a reasonable time frame.

Let's open the statistical compendium *Declassified* once again. This time, turn to page 152. There you'll find a table of irretrievable (killed and missing in action) and medical (wounded and sick) personnel losses in the active army, broken down by quarter for each year of the war.

The grim experience of countless military conflicts of the 20th century shows that there is a certain, highly stable ratio between the number of those killed and those wounded in combat—1 to 3. For every one killed, there are three wounded. Incidentally, the Wehrmacht's casualties in 1941 also fell within precisely these proportions. Perhaps these figures reflect a fundamental relationship between the "resilience" of the human body and the destructive power of weapons from the first half of the 20th century. Be that as it may, in a "normal war" (pardon the cynical expression), medical casualties should

account for 75% of total casualties. To be more precise, it should be even higher than 75%, since in addition to the wounded, there are also those who fall ill—and their numbers are not insignificant among people living for months in mud-filled trenches.

So what does Table No. 72 show us?

In the third quarter of 1941 (i.e., during the first three months of the war), medical losses accounted for only 24.66% of total losses. In other words, the ratio of irrecoverable to medical losses turned out to be not 1 to 3, but 3 to 1. This is a very grim "miracle." Behind this figure lies a huge number of prisoners of war and deserters (who made up the bulk of the Red Army's irrecoverable losses in the summer of 1941), as well as the tragedy of the wounded who were left to be torn apart by the enemy—those who were not evacuated to the rear and, consequently, were not counted under the category of "medical losses."

In the fourth quarter of 1941, the proportion of medical losses nearly doubled—to 40.77%. Such proportions are still very, very far from the situation in a normal, combat-ready army, but nevertheless, the changes are evident.

In the first quarter of 1942, the figure had already reached 65.44%. This is nearly "normal."

In the second and third quarters, the figures were 47.48% and 52.79%, respectively. The Germans had weathered the winter, regained their strength, and once again drove columns of prisoners numbering in the thousands out of the "encirclements" near Kerch and Kharkiv. But, it should be noted, the horrific situation of the summer of 1941 did not repeat itself!

By the end of 1942, the proportion of medical casualties had risen to nearly the "normal" level of 67.25%. From then on, right up until the victorious May of 1945, the figures were as follows: 79, 75, 76, 77, 79, 78... There is not the slightest doubt that a fundamental, qualitative change in the structure of casualties took place. The shift from a 3-to-1 ratio to a 1-to-3 ratio cannot be explained by errors in statistical measurements. A qualitative change in the state of the army, which occurred at the turn of 1942–1943, is evident. The army stopped "scattering," as a result of which the proportion of prisoners of war and deserters fell to a few percent of total losses.

I apologize to anyone I may have unintentionally offended with this cynical arithmetic of human suffering. Believe me, I understand how sacrilegious it is to "play with percentages" when behind those percentages lie millions of people killed and maimed. But what can one do—the work of a military historian is hardly more appealing than that of a medical examiner. Believe me, historians and medical examiners do what they do not out of some morbid fascination with the stench of corpses, but in order to establish a definitive—albeit always belated—but as accurate as possible diagnosis.

The dynamics of the partisan movement's development in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union are no less "diagnostically significant." Unfortunately, we are unable to provide exact figures here—the very nature of partisan warfare precludes the possibility of keeping precise records of "personnel," and the subject of partisan warfare remains to this day a huge "blind spot" in Russian historiography. Nevertheless, even from the few available sources (144, 151, 156, 161), a picture emerges of a radical change in the situation in the occupied territories that occurred in 1942–1943.

"...Most partisan detachments (formed in Belarus by September 1941—M.S.) were composed entirely of NKVD and police personnel, without the involvement of local residents; no connection was

established with Party and Soviet activists... Later, as regional party committees formed partisan units from among local Party and Soviet activists, their leadership core continued to consist of NKVD operatives... In late 1941 and early 1942, the formation and infiltration (i.e., sabotage groups created on Soviet territory were transported across the front line. — M.S.) of partisan units continued... The backbone of the partisan detachments continued to consist of NKVD and militia operatives, as well as agents of the state security agencies...

- ...The overall picture is as follows. By February 1942, the NKVD, in conjunction with Party organs, had prepared and transferred to the enemy's rear 1,798 partisan detachments and 1,533 sabotage groups, totaling 77,939 people. If we assume that in 1941 the total number of partisans in the occupied territory was about 90,000, and the number of partisan detachments was 2,000, then it follows that 90% were trained by the NKVD. "They were also the ones who led them" (151, pp. 71, 76, 82, 83).

Thus, in the early stages of the war (until the spring of 1942), the "people's avengers" units consisted not at all of teenagers and elderly people with hunting rifles—as was commonly portrayed in Soviet mythology—but of "operational personnel" from the punitive agencies. The number of partisans recruited from among local volunteers did not exceed 10,000–15,000 people, i.e., it was tens of times (!!!) smaller than the number of "politsai" and "khivi."

Such were the beginnings of the partisan war. Later, the situation changed significantly—and in a direction directly opposite to what was expected:

"...The Leningrad Regional Department of the NKVD dispatched 287 detachments totaling 11,733 men into the enemy's rear. By February 7, 1942, only 60 of these detachments remained, numbering 1,965 men—that is, about 17%...

...In Ukraine, state security agencies left behind and deployed 778 partisan detachments and 622 sabotage groups, totaling 28,753 men, behind enemy lines. However, as of August 25, 1942, only 22 detachments, numbering 3,310 men, were listed as active. Consequently, over the 12 months of the war, less than 3% of the partisan detachments and groups that had been deployed behind enemy lines in 1941 survived...

...In Belarus, by January 1942, of the 437 groups and detachments that had been dropped behind enemy lines, 412—or 95%—had ceased to exist.

...During the very first winter of the war, almost all large units numbering several hundred people were either destroyed or broke up into separate groups... By mid-1942, the number of partisans stood at 65,000...» (151, pp. 82, 158, 174).

The figures cited above provide a concrete and comprehensive answer to the question of the attitude of the population in the German-occupied territories of the USSR toward the "people's avengers" from among the "agents of the state security agencies."

In such circumstances, the defeat of most of the partisan groups formed during the first year of the war was entirely to be expected. According to the Soviet leadership's plan, these small detachments (with an average strength of 20–25 people) were supposed to serve as "centers of concentration" around which, figuratively speaking, "clouds" were to gather. In reality, however, the number of partisans not only failed to increase but had actually decreased by half by the summer of 1942. And this was despite the fact that the area of the occupied territories had increased significantly following the devastating

defeat near Kharkiv and the German breakthrough toward Stalingrad and Mozdok. Particularly striking is the trend in the numbers of partisan units in Ukraine, where they were virtually wiped out.

The people's war against the invaders did not take on a truly mass character until 1943–1944. For example, in Belarus, where the presence of vast forest areas created particularly favorable conditions, the number of partisans had already reached 68,498 by April 1943. In total, by April 1, 1943, there were 110,889 partisans throughout the German-occupied territory. According to a report by the Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement, as of June 1, 1943, the partisan movement's headquarters were in contact with 1,061 detachments totaling 142,000 fighters. Finally, by January 1944, the number of partisans in Belarus had reached 122,000, and during the winter of 1944, an entire "partisan army" totaling 200,000 fighters was fighting behind enemy lines.

The effectiveness of partisan operations also increased significantly. For example, a postwar analysis based on captured Wehrmacht documents showed that of the 18,000 trains derailed as a result of sabotage on the railways, 15,000 were attacked in 1943–1944. On the eve of Operation "Bagration"—the Red Army's largest offensive operation, which culminated in the liberation of most of Belarus and the defeat of the German Army Group Center— — on the night of July 20, 1944, partisans blew up 40,000 rails, completely paralyzing all rail traffic behind enemy lines. During the period of 1943–1944,

when every German garrison, every motorized convoy, and every train was in a constant state of anticipation of an attack, the newspaper slogan "The earth is burning beneath the occupiers' feet" became a tangible reality.

Of course, the figures and facts cited above can be viewed only as one of the first possible approaches to assessing the situation. But even with all these caveats in mind, the fact of a fundamental, qualitative change in the situation in the occupied territories—the rapid growth of the partisan movement that became apparent in early 1943—is obvious and indisputable.

To summarize the above, the approximate time frame during which the "Great Turning Point" took place can be defined as follows: fall 1942–summer 1943.

In terms of the generally accepted chronology of the war, this spans from the Battle of Stalingrad to the Battle of Kursk.

EPILOGUE

"The World-Historical Significance of the Soviet People's Victory in the Great Patriotic War."

This topic has always been considered very simple among high school and college students. A safe bet. No need to memorize dates or the names of the fronts—just spout off about "the creation of a world socialist system," "the strengthening of authority on the world stage," and "the elimination of the hostile encirclement."

This book was written not for schoolchildren, but for adults who are not afraid of the truth about their country's past and are ready to reflect on its present and future. The citizens of our country have yet to find the answer to the question of what banner Soviet soldiers raised in May 1945 over the defeated Reichstag: the banner of the Great Victory or the banner of their own defeat?

For Stalin, World War II—the war he so persistently and so clumsily prepared for, provoked, and fueled

—ended in victory. Having spilled rivers of human blood, and saved from what seemed like certain doom by the self-sacrificing heroism of millions of Soviet people, Stalin's regime emerged from the war in the radiance and splendor of the greatest triumph. A gigantic army (which, having cast aside the last vestiges of its revolutionary past as unnecessary, was no longer called "Red") now stood on the banks of the Danube and the Elbe. The Master himself was proclaimed the most brilliant military commander of all time and all nations. His admiring and enchanted henchmen bestowed upon him the highest military rank of Generalissimo. A political bankrupt and despicable coward—who in the early days of the war had not even mustered the courage to address the people to explain what had happened—was declared the "architect and organizer of the Great Victory."

There is no denying that the growth of the Soviet Union's military-technical might and the enormous increase in its capacity to strike fear into the entire world were truly staggering. Thousands of metric tons of technical documentation were hauled out of defeated Germany, along with entire research and design teams. From gullible enemy-allies, the latest military technologies were bought, obtained, and stolen by any means necessary. The haul was enormous: jet engines, anti-aircraft missiles, radar systems, ballistic missiles, infrared homing systems... And finally, the crowning achievement of all these efforts—twenty thousand pages of technical specifications for the American atomic bomb, copied and successfully tested just four years after the fall of Berlin.

By the time Stalin died—or was he poisoned by his comrades in the Politburo?—the Soviet Union was armed and extremely dangerous. More so than ever before. And yet, it is hard to believe that millions of people suffered a martyr's death solely for this purpose. Yes, under unimaginably harsh conditions created by years of tyranny under Stalin's criminal regime, the Soviet people and their multinational Red Army saved Europe from fascist enslavement. Once again, the oppressed Russian peasant, sacrificing himself, threw open the door to peace and prosperity for other nations. Monuments to the Soviet soldier should stand in the squares of Paris and Vienna, London and Brussels.

But what were the profound, long-term consequences of the Great Patriotic War for Russia itself?

How did the loss of millions of the very best, the most honest, and the bravest affect the nation's moral foundations and its very gene pool?

Did the spiritual strength of the people not become exhausted by the superhuman strain of those four years?

Was that most brilliant outburst of mass heroism and mass self-sacrifice, which the Soviet people revealed to an astonished world, not the last surge of strength from a dying nation?

These are questions to which only life itself can provide answers, and in the face of which the historian can do nothing but fall silent and draw the final conclusion.

APPENDIX No. 1

MILITARY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

1. Structure of the Ground Forces

The ground forces formed the backbone of the armed forces of the USSR and Germany. In the case of Germany, they are referred to as the "Wehrmacht." As for the Soviet Union, the term "Red Army"

(Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, RKKA) can refer either to the entire Armed Forces or solely to the ground forces.

Germany's military aviation (Air Force, Luftwaffe) is usually referred to as the "Luftwaffe."

A distinctive feature of the Luftwaffe was the inclusion of ground-based air defense (AD) forces—that is, anti-aircraft, searchlight, and radar units—within its structure.

2. Units, Formations, and Commands

The primary "building block" of the military structure is the REGIMENT. This is a military unit with its own unique number and its own banner. The structural subunits within a regiment (in descending order of personnel strength) are: battalion, company, platoon, and squad. Subunits do not have their own "personal" numbers and are designated by ordinal numbers, for example: "third platoon of the second company of the first battalion of the 486th Rifle Regiment." Approximate strength of rifle units and subunits:

— regiment — 3,000–4,000 personnel;

— battalion — 700–800 men;

— company — 200 men;

— platoon — 50 people;

— a squad — 10 men.

The Red Army had rifle regiments (sp), motorized rifle regiments (msp), and tank regiments (tp). Artillery regiments, depending on the type of weaponry used, were sometimes designated as "field artillery regiments" (pap) or "howitzer artillery regiments" (hap). The subunits of an artillery regiment are called a division and a battery. The composition and number of weapons in an artillery regiment vary greatly; by way of example, here is a typical structure:

— 4 guns per battery;

— 12 guns in one division (three batteries);

— 36 or 48 guns in a regiment (three to four divisions).

Several regiments were combined into the main tactical unit—the DIVISION. Thus, a Red Army rifle division (sd) consisted of three rifle regiments and two artillery regiments, with a total of 14,483 personnel. A Red Army motorized division consisted of two rifle regiments, one tank regiment, and one artillery regiment. Alongside divisions (the primary tactical unit), the Red Army also had brigades (rifle, tank, and artillery). A brigade was smaller than a division and usually consisted of 2–3 regiments (or 4–5 separate battalions).

Several divisions were combined into an infantry CORPS (SK). The Red Army's infantry corps did not have a fixed strength and could include anywhere from two to five infantry divisions. In addition, the corps included reinforcement units (one or two artillery regiments, an anti-aircraft battery, a pontoon-

bridge battalion, etc.).

Mechanized corps (MK) consisted of two tank divisions and one motorized division, a separate motorcycle regiment, and support units.

The same terms and abbreviations are used in reference to the Wehrmacht, except that the term “infantry” is used instead of “rifle”: infantry regiment (IR), infantry division (ID). A Wehrmacht infantry division had a strength of 16,589 personnel, comprising three infantry regiments and one artillery regiment, as well as several separate battalions and batteries. The equivalent of a rifle corps in the Wehrmacht is designated as an “army corps” (AK). Wehrmacht tank corps (TK) did not have a fixed structure; as a rule, a Wehrmacht tank corps consisted of two tank divisions and one or two motorized divisions.

Several corps were combined into a large formation—an ARMY. In the text of this book, they are designated as follows: 5th Army, 10th Army... In peacetime, an army was the largest formation within the Red Army. During wartime (or on the eve of a planned war), several armies, individual divisions, and corps were combined into the most powerful formation—the Front. In the Wehrmacht, the equivalent of a “front” was a large formation called an Army Group. Three Army Groups were deployed for the invasion of the Soviet Union: “North” (tasked with advancing through the Baltic states toward Leningrad), “Center” (for an offensive on Minsk–Smolensk), and “South” (to capture Ukraine and, in coordination with the Romanian army, Moldova).

In the Red Army’s tank forces, there were no formations higher in rank than a mechanized corps (mechkorpus). In the Wehrmacht, however, four tank groups (TGr) were formed: the 1st TGr as part of Army Group “South,” the 2nd and 3rd as part of Army Group “Center,” and the 4th Tank Group as part of Army Group “North.” They consisted of either two (the 4th and 3rd Tank Groups) or three (the 2nd and 1st Tank Groups) tank corps.

3. Artillery and Mortars

Barrel artillery pieces are divided into two main classes: CANNONS and HOWITZERS. The main external difference is barrel length: cannons have long barrels (40–50 calibers), while howitzers have short barrels (20–30 calibers). The different barrel lengths result in a decisive difference in the projectile’s muzzle velocity: 650–750 m/s for cannons and 350–500 m/s for howitzers. Of course, it is not the barrel itself that accelerates the projectile, but the propellant charge, which in a cannon artillery round (the main elements of an artillery round are the projectile, the fuze, and the propellant charge?) is significantly more powerful than in a howitzer artillery round. The greater power (i.e., greater weight of gunpowder) of a cannon round results in a heavier and larger breechblock, barrel, recoil mechanism, and all other components and assemblies of the cannon. As a result, a cannon weighs several times more than a howitzer of the same caliber. For example, the most widely used howitzer in the Red Army, the 122-mm M-30, weighed (in combat configuration, i.e., excluding the weight of the artillery carriage—a two-wheeled cart on which the gun’s carriage rests during movement) 2,200 kg, while the A-19 cannon of the same 122 mm caliber weighed 7,080 kg in combat configuration.

The high muzzle velocity of the cannon shell allows for a significantly greater firing range (for example, the maximum firing range of the 122-mm howitzer was 8.9 km, while that of the 122-mm A-19 cannon was 20.4 km). When firing at short ranges, the gun (thanks to the high muzzle velocity of the projectile) allows for aimed “ground-level fire” (the projectile’s flight path is nearly straight and almost parallel to the ground). Howitzers, on the other hand, fire “overhead fire” (the projectile is fired

at an angle of 30–45 degrees to the horizon and follows a parabolic trajectory), which in some cases is an important tactical advantage (the ability to fire at invisible targets on the reverse slopes of hills and to engage enemy personnel hidden in foxholes and trenches).

A distinctive variety of artillery pieces were the so-called regimental and mountain guns.

These were light, short-barreled guns with a low muzzle velocity (more typical of howitzers), but designed (unlike howitzers) for both indirect and direct fire at short ranges (400–500 m).

A MORTAR is a smoothbore weapon designed to launch a mine—a projectile with aerodynamic wing-like stabilizers (similar to the feathers on an arrow). Although the mortar tube is closed at the bottom and is therefore pressurized by the gases from the propellant charge, this pressure is an order of magnitude lower than the pressure inside the barrel of a conventional artillery piece. The recoil from the shot is transmitted to the ground through the base plate. As a result, the mortar barrel (and the entire system as a whole) is many times lighter than a howitzer of the same caliber. For example, a 120-mm mortar weighed (in combat configuration) only 275 kg.

Among the disadvantages (or distinctive features) of mortars are the low range and accuracy of fire due to the low muzzle velocity of the projectile, as well as the fundamental inability to conduct "suppressive fire." Their advantages include simplicity and reliability of design, low weight, and high combat rate of fire. The production of mortars did not require the use of complex equipment or high-alloy steels

3. Anti-tank guns and armor-piercing shells

Special types of guns—anti-tank guns—were developed to combat tanks (and other armored targets). As long as the primary type of armor-piercing projectile was a steel "hollow-point" round that penetrated tank armor through its kinetic energy, the main requirement for an anti-tank gun was the highest possible muzzle velocity. Structurally, this required an exceptionally long barrel (60 calibers or more). High armor-penetration capability is the most important, but not the only, requirement for an anti-tank gun and an armor-piercing projectile. A tank is capable of maneuvering both operationally (tanks can unexpectedly appear at unpredictable points along the front) and tactically (directly on the battlefield). Accordingly, a weapon designed to combat tanks (an anti-tank gun) must possess the greatest possible ability to maneuver "on wheels and under fire." This means that the anti-tank gun must be light enough for the gun crew to manually (in the literal sense of the word) deploy it to a firing position and roll it to another position. In addition, the wheeled running gear must allow the anti-tank gun to be towed across rough terrain at high speed.

All of the above led to the use of anti-tank guns of relatively small caliber (37/57 mm) but with long barrels and a muzzle velocity ranging from 750 to 1,150 m/s (which is 3.3 times the speed of sound at ground level). In the early stages of World War II, even smaller-caliber systems were widely used: 20/25-mm anti-tank guns and 8/15-mm anti-tank rifles. However, further developments in armored vehicles rendered not only the ultra-light systems obsolete, but also the most common 37-, 45-, and 50-mm anti-tank guns. By the end of the war, the caliber of anti-tank guns had increased to 75/88 mm. This completely solved the problem of armor penetration (the German 88-mm Rak-43 anti-tank gun could penetrate 180 mm of armor at short ranges), but the weight of the gun exceeded all reasonable limits (the Rak-43 weighed 3,700 kg, which made it practically immobile on the battlefield). In essence, anti-tank artillery had reached an impasse, a dead end from which a way out became possible only after the development of cumulative warheads, for which the projectile's velocity upon impact

with the armor was no longer a factor—a development that made it possible in the postwar period to replace the antitank gun with an unguided rocket (antitank grenade launcher) or a remotely guided missile (ATGM).

4. Tanks, light tanks, self-propelled guns, armored vehicles, and armored personnel carriers

A TANK is a combat vehicle with three distinctive features:

— an armored hull,

— a tracked undercarriage,

— a gun mounted in a rotating turret.

Flamethrower (or “chemical”) tanks were a fairly common type of tank at the start of World War II. Instead of a gun, the rotating turret of such a tank was equipped with a device capable of ejecting several liters of liquid (a flammable mixture or liquid chemical agents such as mustard gas) over a distance of 50–80 m. Flamethrower tanks were intended to be used against infantry sheltered in trenches and to neutralize garrisons in pillboxes.

Mounting an artillery piece inside a rotating turret of limited dimensions presents a highly complex engineering challenge. Consequently, tanks at the start of the war were armed with small-caliber guns (37/50 mm) or short-barreled (with a short effective range) 75/76 mm guns. Combat experience showed that guns with these specifications were insufficient for effectively supporting infantry on the battlefield. Consequently, a new type of armored tracked vehicle was developed—SELF-PROPELLED GUNS (“assault guns,” self-propelled artillery units, SPGs). The external difference between an SAU and a tank is the absence of a rotating turret (the gun is mounted in a fixed fighting compartment, sometimes even open at the rear). All types of SPGs can be broadly divided into two groups: infantry support guns and tank destroyers. In the first case, the armament consists of a field gun (or howitzer with a caliber of up to 152 mm) and machine guns; in the second case, SPGs were armed with an anti-tank gun and were particularly heavily armored.

In the 1930s, light tankettes (small tanks) armed with machine guns were mass-produced. In the Soviet Union, such tankettes (T-37/T-38/T-40), intended for use in the reconnaissance units of tank and infantry divisions, also had the ability to move across water (amphibious tanks). However, as infantry units became increasingly equipped with anti-tank defenses, the use of tankettes became less and less feasible. By the end of World War II, they had virtually disappeared as a distinct class of combat vehicles.

An ARMORED VEHICLE is a wheeled, enclosed, armored combat vehicle armed with a machine gun (and, in some cases, a cannon). The most powerful armored vehicles were the Soviet BA-10s, built on the chassis of a three-axle all-terrain vehicle and armed with a 45-mm cannon in the rotating turret of a light tank. Despite their powerful (for their time) armament, gun-armed armored vehicles did not become widely used, as they were significantly inferior to tanks in terms of cross-country mobility. On the other hand, a wide variety of light armored vehicle models (reconnaissance, command, and radio-communication vehicles) were successfully used throughout the war.

ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS, although often developed on the same chassis as armored cars, differed radically from the latter in both purpose and appearance. Armored personnel carriers of

the World War II era were, as a rule, open-top wheeled vehicles with armored sides and a driver's compartment, equipped with light machine-gun armament (or no armament at all). They were designed to transport the personnel of motorized infantry units within tank (motorized) divisions. An armored personnel carrier of that period was not an infantry fighting vehicle (IFV); its sole purpose was to transport motorized infantry to the deployment area; on the battlefield, the motorized infantry moved independently (i.e., on foot).